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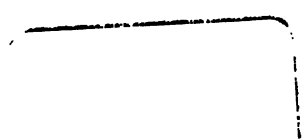
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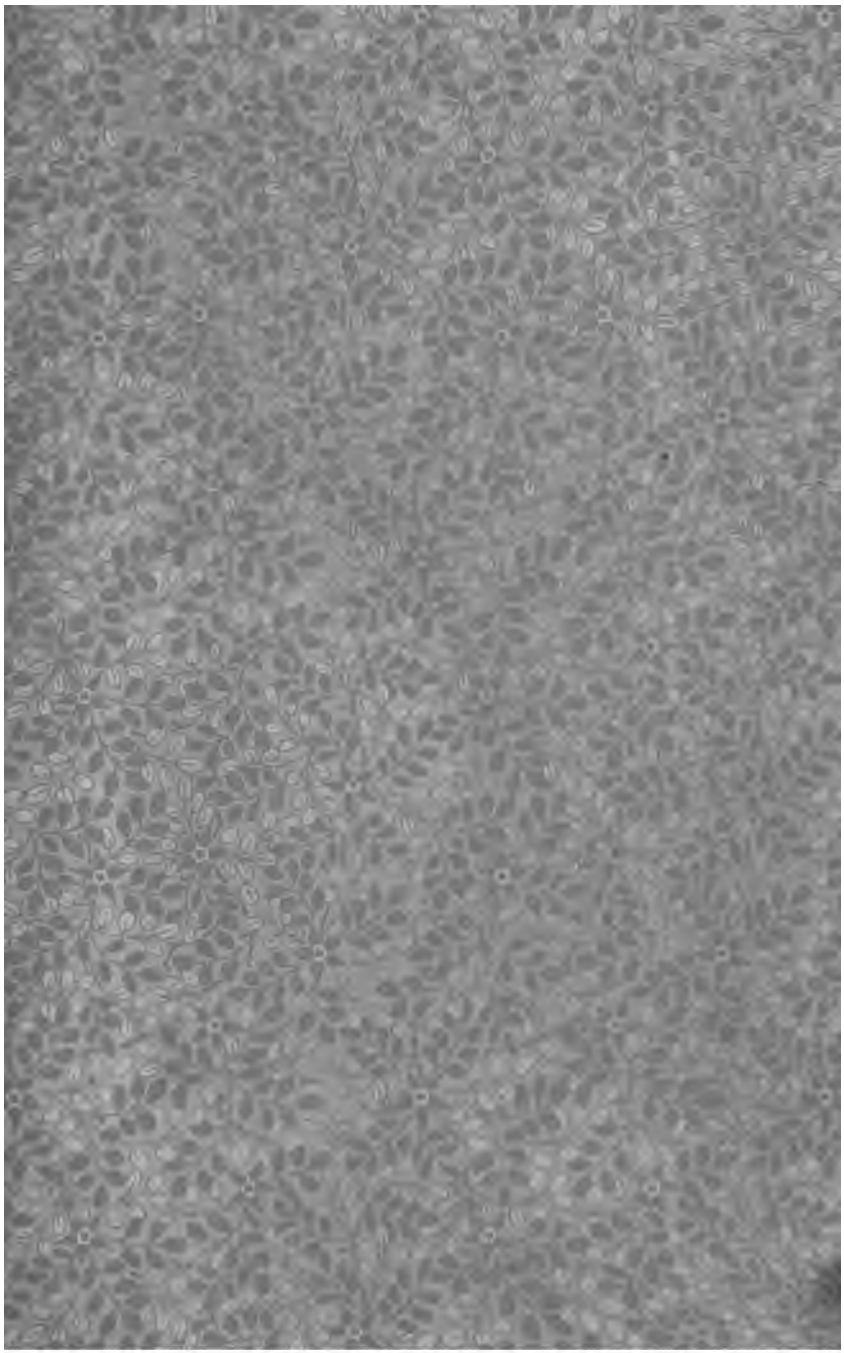
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A GRAPE FROM A THORN






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A GRAPE FROM A THORN

VOL. II.



A GRAPE FROM A THORN

BY

JAMES PAYN

AUTHOR OF

'LOST SIR MASSINGBERD' 'BY PROXY' AND 'HIGH SPIRITS'

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.



LONDON

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CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.

CHAP.		PAGE
XVIII.	A Double Game	1
XIX.	The Lost Locket	15
XX.	Mr. Aird's Love Story	29
XXI.	Illness in the Hotel	50
XXII.	The Invitation	69
XXIII.	The Widow's Ring	88
XXIV.	A Change of Views	105
XXV.	In Quarantine	122
XXVI.	A Change of Patients	144
XXVII.	A Female Champion	159

CHAP.		PAGE
XXVIII.	Dying Words	171
XXIX.	A Friend in Need	186
XXX.	A Charitable Committee	208
XXXI.	Declined with Thanks	224
XXXII.	Miss Burt	246
XXXIII.	Barton Castle	263
XXXIV.	A Revelation	275
XXXV.	The Churchyard	291
XXXVI.	Thrust and Parry	307

A GRAPE FROM A THORN.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DOUBLE GAME.

It is the custom of the clergy to divide their congregations into the Evil and the Good, which is very convenient, and simplifies a somewhat abstruse matter exceedingly; but, unhappily, the Good—that is, the folks without evil in them (except that little modicum of original sin, which, in view of the immense amount of peccadilloes imported by mankind since that first cargo, may be disregarded)—are so very few that it is hardly worth while to address them from the pulpit at all, and more especially as they stand in no need of such exhortation. In the case of the vast

majority even of church-goers, if the evil in them were represented by a black framework, as in a mourning envelope, we should see them, I am afraid, with a pretty broad border; only you and I, and half a dozen others of this congregation, perhaps, would be represented by what stationers call the 'mitigated grief size'—perhaps a quarter of an inch. I suspect some people would exhibit scarcely enough of white envelope to write their direction upon. To this last class the moralist, if not the divine, would undoubtedly have relegated the Hon. George Emilius Josceline, and especially if he could have looked into his mind after that morning's interview with Mr. Felspar, which had seemed to touch him to the very core, whereas what was uppermost in his thoughts, as he toiled up the hill towards his hotel, was the reflection that he had gained his end, and, to a certain extent, even outwitted his late companion. The artist had given his word not to put any finishing touches to Ella's drawing; 'and without them,' reflected this unnatural father, 'I should think even this two-

penny-halfpenny magazine will never admit it into its columns.'

It is a sad thing to have to record of any parent that he should actually wish his daughter's mental gifts to escape recognition; but Mr. Josceline's case was not an unparalleled one. Poverty, like a distorting mirror, often makes what is fair seem foul to us. How often, for example, has a poor man cause to curse his daughter's beauty! But what made Mr. Josceline's case a bad one, rather than a hard one, was that his poverty had been brought about by his own hands, which had squandered his means in all sorts of unworthy ways. Truth to say, for all that was white on his envelope he was indebted to his daughter; that is to say, his love for her had cleared a space for itself, as it were, in the midst of his selfish recklessness, as though a dove should nestle on a rubbish heap. And, what was worst of all, though to him it did not appear so, the very plans he had in his mind for her benefit were themselves far from what they should be; he was fixed on making her

comfortable after his own ideas, no matter at what risk of soiling her white wings.

It may be thought that Mr. Josceline ran a great danger in reposing his confidence in a comparative stranger like Mr. Felspar; but the danger was greater than it looked. Short as his acquaintance had been with the young painter, he had gauged his character pretty accurately; and what he had heard of him—and he had made certain inquiries—had corroborated his own view. Moreover, if he were wrong; if Felspar and his friend were like most young men of their class—mere fortune hunters—the knowledge of the fact that Ella was portionless would at least put an end to all peril from that quarter, whatever mischief it might work (by the news getting abroad) in others. And, as Mr. Josceline thought, there *was* peril from that quarter. He had acknowledged to himself the attractions of Vernon (for he had been attracted, himself, towards him), and noticed the pleasure Ella derived from his society. He had thought the anxiety she had showed in connection with

the adder's bite more significant even than it really was; he had been wont to see young ladies of her position take little services from young gentlemen (if they were 'ineligible') very coolly, and he did not understand how gratitude affects a pure and ingenuous nature. What had, however, alarmed him more than anything was the intelligence, received from Felspar himself, that his daughter's drawing had been directly suggested to her by Vernon. He had observed the 'pleased alacrity' with which she had set to work upon it the previous evening, and the diligence with which she had proceeded with it, and had wondered at the cause. And now he no longer wondered, but feared. It was not easy to alarm a mind so well balanced—in worldly scales—as his was; but he had become of late a prey to anxiety upon this subject, and the state of his health increased it. He had come to Wallington Bay as the place best adapted for a certain plan he had vaguely had in view, and this had already taken shape. It was of extreme importance—for his time was growing short—that nothing

should interfere with it; hence his recent measure of precaution. With Vernon brushed aside, the road, though difficult, would at least be clear before him.

On his way back to the hotel, Mr. Josceline met Mrs. and Miss Jennynge 'going out for a promenade,' as the elder lady called it, in the grounds, for an appetite for their lunch; and with much politeness he offered to accompany them.

They accepted his offer with effusion. They congratulated themselves that they had announced their intention of not going far from home, since they had now a good cause for presenting themselves to the envious eyes of the other guests of the *Ultramarine* (some of whom had already their noses flattened to the windows) in the company of 'the Hon. George Emilius,' as Mrs. Armytage was wont familiarly to speak of her new aquaintance. To lookers on, the mother on one side, the daughter on the other, were apparently engaging him in earnest conversation, though the elder lady was, in fact, the chief speaker.

'How wicked you are, Mr. Josceline,' said she, 'to make poor Mr. Felspar so idle! You should not thus misuse your social attractions; I saw you talking to him under the elm tree yonder for ever so long.'

'I had no idea that your eye was upon me, Mrs. Jennynge; but even if I had known it, my conscience would not have pricked me. If I did detain Mr. Felspar for five minutes, it was only from his luncheon.'

'He ought to have been at work upon my picture,' said Mrs. Jennynge, with a pretence at severity.

'Ah, that, indeed, would have been a pleasant occupation!' said Mr. Josceline, gaily; then suddenly reflecting that it was not Mrs. Jennynge's portrait, but her husband's on which the artist was engaged, he added, 'for it is no doubt a pleasure, though a mournful one, to embalm, as it were, the memory of the dead by one's imperishable pencil. It was upon the subject of art that we two were talking just now—or rather upon which he was talking and I was listening.'

'Oh, that was it, was it?' said Miss Jennynge, with a significant glance at her mamma. 'We could not think what it was that seemed to interest you both so much.'

Some people would have felt annoyed at being subjected to the sort of espionage to which the young lady had confessed so naïvely, but not so Mr. Josceline; he was not surprised, and was far from being displeased at it. It not only showed that his present companions took a personal interest in him, but proved that not a point would be missed in the part he was about to play.

'To you, Miss Jennynge,' he replied, 'who are, yourself, a devotee to art, no interest in that subject can appear exaggerated or misplaced.'

'Well, I don't know about that,' observed her mother, tartly; 'Anastasia keeps her spirits up uncommonly well for a devotee.'

The young lady looked up in some astonishment at this unexpected ebullition; but Mr. Josceline was not astonished. He perceived that the widow was jealous of the attention he

was paying to Anastasia, of whom generally she stood in some fear.

'I don't think it is necessary, dear Mrs. Jennynge,' he said, soothingly, 'to be melancholy because we are devoted. In your case, for example—what is the matter?'

'Nothing; I fancied I heard that horrid Fido in our sitting room.'

Mr. Josceline had also heard a dog bark; but he doubted that that had been the cause of Mrs. Jennynge's interruption. She wanted, as he guessed, to put a stop to any reference to her deceased husband, of whom in general she could never talk enough; this he thought—combined with her jealousy—was a most encouraging sign.

'Ah, Mr. Josceline!' she continued, 'you gentlemen little know what we ladies suffer.'

'That is your own faults,' answered Mr. Josceline, gallantly. 'To us you always appear so beaming that we never think of the fortitude that has enabled you to hide your sorrows.' And, while he addressed his voice to Mrs.

Jennynge, he suffered his eyes to rest admiringly on Anastasia.

'That is his horrid bark,' cried the widow, with irritation—'I thought I could not have been mistaken. He is shut up in our room all by himself, Anastasia, and will destroy your dear father's precious portrait. I'll just run in and let him out.'

'How ridiculous mamma makes herself about that picture!' exclaimed the young lady, when Mr. Josceline and she were left alone.

'We must all have something to love, if it is but a memory,' he returned, in a tone that was not only apologetic but even tender; and I am afraid, it must be confessed, that Mr. Josceline pressed—though almost imperceptibly—Anastasia's arm.

'Well, she has got *me*,' returned the young lady with indignation.

Mr. Josceline was wondering within himself whether she was resenting that delicate pressure of the arm, or whether the movement had not been demonstrative enough to attract her attention.

'That is true, my dear young lady, and to most people it would be enough. To some people, indeed, it would be all sufficient. But your mother is peculiar.'

'Very,' assented Anastasia, sharply. 'She is so imprudent, for one thing. The idea of her coming out on the terrace, here, at her time of life, without a shawl! She can never be persuaded that she is no longer young.'

'Ah, that is what we old folks cling to—our youth,' observed Mr. Josceline, gently. 'To you, who are still in the enjoyment of it, and who possess all that makes life worth having —health, beauty, and accomplishments—you cannot understand us, Miss Jennynge.'

'No, I can't,' said Anastasia, flatly. 'I think mamma ought to know better than to be affecting to be my age.'

'Which is three-and-twenty?' hazarded Mr. Josceline, though he judged her to be five years older at the very least.

'I am three-and-twenty next birthday,' replied Anastasia, without moving a muscle.

'I thought so; I am generally pretty

correct in my guesses at age,' returned her companion. 'I wish I were a younger man,' he added, regretfully.

'A man, I have read, is as old as he feels,' returned the young lady, much mollified; 'a woman as old as she looks. Now my mother looks sixty if she looks a day—— But, there she comes;' and Mrs. Jennynge reappeared from the house, though, as it happened, only to call them in to luncheon.

Upon the whole Mr. Josceline flattered himself he had done a good stroke of business. It was true he had found Anastasia very resentful of the attentions he had been paying for the last day or two to her mother. It could not but be to her disadvantage that that lady should think of marrying again; but that she should so openly have hinted her disgust at any such idea—for that that was what she meant when she spoke of her mother's affecting youthfulness he was certain—was very satisfactory to him; it showed that the possibility of that lady's being married for the third time had presented itself to Anastasia, and how much more, therefore,

must it have done so to the widow herself. His own little attentions to the young lady—and it must be admitted that he took some pleasure in paying them; the cajolement of young women was a habit with him, and pleased him, even though nothing came of it, just as writing a sonnet, though not designed for publication, pleases a bard—had, indeed, been somewhat icily received, though he felt that just at last there had been symptoms of a thaw; but he had had no object in them beyond throwing her off her guard, and, if possible, diverting the suspicions of other people into a wrong direction.

In this he had been successful even beyond his hopes. For Mrs. Armytage had had her eyes glued to the window-pane of her private sitting room which commanded the terrace throughout the interview. Her exclamations of contempt at Mr. Josceline's familiarity with the widow were forcible and frequent. 'How can he so demean himself? What a fool he is making of that old woman!' &c. &c.; but when Mrs. Jennynge had left him, and she

observed the attentions he was paying to Anastasia, she was even still more scandalised—by Anastasia.

'What a forward minx! There is no knowing what a girl may not do with an old man if she throws herself at him like that. I think it is my bounden duty as a matron—and the only one qualified to advise that sweet young creature—to warn Miss Josceline of her father's peril.'

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LOST LOCKET.

THOUGH the luncheon-bell had rung, Ella did not make her appearance at the *table-d'hôte* —a circumstance which would have annoyed and perhaps even alarmed her father, but for the fact that others also had failed to appear there as usual. Mr. Aird and Davey were absentees, and Mr. Josceline had been informed by Mrs. Trant that his daughter had left the hotel only a few minutes before his own return thither, accompanied by the younger gentleman. Where Mr. Aird was she did not know, and it had struck her that this was the first occasion on which she had seen the little fellow out of his father's company. He had come in by himself, it seemed, and then departed almost immediately with Ella.

'I am afraid it's an elopement,' observed

Mrs. Jennynge, with a little giggle, as she dissected a prawn; 'you really ought to have put a stop to the flirtation between those two young people earlier, Mr. Josceline.'

Mrs. Armytage had it on the tip of her tongue to say, 'Don't *you* talk; you've got a daughter of your own to look after;' but she restrained herself with an effort. It made her angry, however, to remark that Mr. Josceline —who perhaps felt that he owed the widow some reparation for his recent conduct to her— laughed at this sally very much.

'It would have shown more prudence in the young lady,' observed Mrs. Armytage, 'if she had run away with the father instead of the son. I understand Mr. Aird is immensely rich.'

The observation was intentionally a disagreeable one. Mrs. Armytage had meant to give Mr. Josceline what she called a rap on the knuckles for his encouragement of those vulgar Jennynges, but she had no idea how tender his knuckles were. She had inadvertently suggested the very thing which he had been re-

volving in his own mind, but which he was especially solicitous to prevent occurring to anyone else. Without so much as a wince, however, he replied indifferently, 'Well; I don't much believe in the great fortune of retired Indians; one hears of their having so many laks of rupees, but it often turns out that they have a lack of pounds sterling. The day for the shaking of the Pagoda tree has gone by.'

'But it had not gone by when Mr. Aird first stood at the foot of it,' returned Mrs. Armytage.

'After all, *what* is money?' ejaculated Mrs. Jennynge, sentimentally.

'I should like to know what some of us would be without it?' remarked her rival, contemptuously.

Poor Mrs. Jennynge felt the dart, and also her incapacity to hold her own in single combat with her enemy; she was sorry she had spoken, but she could not let the ball rest where it had been flung—that is, in her own lap. 'I mean what is money, after all, without other things to enable us to enjoy it?' she

stammered out. 'Without health, for instance; poor Mr. Aird—and indeed little Davey also—is a case in point.'

'That doesn't militate against his being a good match,' insisted Mrs. Armytage; 'indeed, quite the contrary.'

'What sentiments!' exclaimed Anastasia.

'Yes; it's very fine,' snapped Mrs. Armytage, with the quickness and fire of a lucifer match—and by no means one of those that can 'only light upon its own box'—'but all of us are not all poetry and romance like you, Miss Jennynge; it's wonderful to me—though very creditable to yourself—that you should have retained your simplicity so long.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Wallace, gently, in the pause that followed this onslaught—which, to say truth (in conjunction with her tight lacing and the prawns), had taken all the breath out of poor Anastasia, 'for my part, the longer I live the more I like simplicity.

'Ah, but you've no girls to marry!' rejoined Mrs. Armytage, tartly.

'That's true,' sighed Mrs. Wallace; her

thoughts at once transporting her far from the present scene to a distant grave.

'Indeed,' said Mrs. Percival Lott, taking courage from the number of her allies to cast her stone at the common enemy, 'I don't see why you should take such mercenary views of your own sex, Mrs. Armytage.'

'Of course not, because you've caught a husband,' was the swift rejoinder; 'if you were upon your promotion you would probably be looking after the loaves and fishes like any other young woman.'

The suspected bride turned scarlet; nor was her confusion mitigated by the circumstance that her husband, tickled, perhaps, by some reminiscences of his courting days, broke out into a little chuckle.

'Upon my word,' said Mr. Josceline, smiling, 'I shall rise and fly, Mrs. Armytage, for fear it may be the time for the males to come next under your castigation.'

'No, no; I have not a word to say against *them*,' returned the lady addressed; 'they are naturally simple, and therefore one never finds

them making a pretence of being so. For my part, I don't believe in a designing man.'

'You are wrong, there, madam—or rather as far from right as it is possible you can be,' said Mr. Josceline, politely. 'Do you think the Professor, for instance, has never been designing?'

'Eh, what?' exclaimed that learned man, looking up from a brown study of the deepest tint, and seeing Mr. Josceline with his hand upon his half-pint of sherry; 'no, I thank you, not at this time of day.'

'Very likely,' laughed Mr. Josceline, rising from his chair; 'but a little earlier, perhaps, it was different.'

And in the general peal of laughter evoked by the Professor's mistake Mr. Josceline escaped from the room with considerable self-congratulation. If Mrs. Armytage's suspicions were aroused in one direction respecting him, it was clear that they were cast asleep in another.

Meanwhile Ella is wandering by the seashore, far from the hotel (and lunch), with little Davey's hand fast clasped in hers; their eyes

are fixed on the lessening sand—for the tide is rising—with eager intentness, and every piece of tangled weed and sea-worn rock is being examined by them as for lost treasure.

She had found the little fellow in tears just leaving the hotel, to which he had come back from his usual morning walk only a few minutes, and in reply to her compassionate inquiry had told her his pitiful story.

'Poor papa has met with a great misfortune, Miss Josceline,' he had sobbed out.

'Good heavens! But let us send him help,' cried Ella, at once imagining that he had been cut off in some bay by the sea, or had fallen over a cliff and broken his leg.

'No, no; nobody can help him; I was not to tell anybody,' he said; 'only I am sure he would let me tell you. *You* would not steal anything that belonged to anybody else, even if you found it, would you, Miss Josceline?'

'Indeed, I hope not, my dear. But what has your father lost? His purse?'

'Oh, no; I don't think he would care for that one half as much. It is his locket with

mamma's picture in it; he used to wear it on his watch-chain, you know.'

Ella remembered that he wore a locket of a heart-shape in dead gold—indeed Mrs. Armytage had once made a flippant allusion to it that Mr. Aird had resented extremely—and she said so. 'Now be very careful, Davey. Where did you walk to-day! I mean, which was the exact path you took up to the moment your father missed the locket?'

'Oh, it's no use, Miss Josceline. I came back along it myself, and it was nowhere to be seen. Papa thought it just possible that he might have left it at home on his dressing-table, and sent me back to look; and if it wasn't there I was to go back to him.'

'But, my dear child, you have not had your lunch, and you look fagged and tired as it is.'

'Oh, but I had rather go back to papa. I *must* go!'

'Very good, then I will go with you; only you shall have a bag of biscuits to put in your pocket, to eat as you go along.'

Thus provisioned, off they started, beginning to examine the ground from the first moment, and keeping as closely as Davey could recollect to the path his father had taken. The pair had ventured on a longer walk than usual, to a promontory called the Monkshead, and about half-way thither Mr Aird had discovered his loss.

'Did you take the cliff path, or go by the sands, Davey?'

'We took the cliff path; only once we dipped down to the sands in Abbot's Creek.'

'And you came back by yourself exactly the same way?'

'No; I did not come by the Creek at all, because I wanted to be quick.'

'Then, depend upon it, the locket is in the Creek, Davey.'

'No; papa thought not; he fancied he had seen it after we had climbed the cliff again, and it is on the cliff that he is looking for it.'

'However, he may be mistaken; and, whether he is or not, we will try the Creek, because our only chance of finding the locket

there is to do so at once; the tide is coming in, and if it once flows over it, it is gone for ever; whereas on the cliff it may be found at any time, and the folks about Wallington are honest people, I think, notwithstanding your father's fears, and whoever finds it is sure to bring it to the hotel.'

This argument carried conviction with it even to little Davey; but the boy was tired and fagged, and his grief on his father's account had also helped to exhaust the little strength he had. Ella could judge of Mr. Aird's anxiety about the locket, from his having for the moment lost sight of the weakness of his child, in thus telling him to return to him after so long a walk. She would have made him sit down where he was and gone on by herself, but for the necessity of having the exact route pointed out to her which his father had taken. A sudden thought, however, struck her.

'Can you ride pick-a-back, Davey?'

'Oh, yes; I often do upon papa's back, when I feel tired.' So Ella knelt down and, though the path was steep and the day was

hot, she took him on her shoulders, and there he sat, eating steadily through his bag of biscuits, and with his little legs clinging tightly round her neck, like the old man of the sea in the story of 'Sinbad the Sailor.'

For some time he went on directing her footsteps in childish contentment, but presently—his last biscuit having been disposed of—he whispered in his thin treble, 'Ain't 'oo tired, Miss Josceline? I can walk now.'

She was very tired, but assured him, with a kiss, that he was as light as a feather; and so she toiled on till they reached Abbot's Creek. Here she let him down, for she could not carry him down the cliff, and on the smooth and still hard sand of the bay it was easy walking for him. They looked for what they sought in vain, until they had almost reached the place where they had to ascend again, when a bright something, looking like the sparkle of the sundew, attracted her quick eye. On the very verge of the line of the encroaching sea, and far below high-water mark, was the gold locket, sticking edgeways in the sand, where

it had of course fallen without the least noise.

'Oh, how glad papa will be!' cried Davey, clapping his little hands; 'and but for you, Miss Josceline, we should never have found it.'

'You dear boy!' cried she, almost as pleased as himself at her success, and touched also with the child's manner and good feeling; 'you must do one thing in return for this little service; you must not call me Miss Josceline any more, but Ella, and you must give me a kiss.'

'You dear, good Ella,' he said, putting up his weary-looking but happy face to meet her embrace. 'Oh, how pleased dear papa will be!'

To a kind heart there is no errand so pleasant as to carry to another some good news; and leaving the child safely ensconced under the shade of a rock upon the beach, 'to be left till called for,' Ella at once proceeded to toil up the cliff in search of Mr. Aird.

If Mrs. Armytage, or even Mrs. Jennynge, had seen her at it, they would probably have expressed disapprobation; they would have

thought it perhaps 'a little imprudent' in her —if they had known her circumstances they would certainly have called it 'bold'—thus to seek an interview with the widower alone; whereas the motive that was actuating Ella was simply what would have urged her in the scriptural sense to visit 'the widow.' To think of the desolate old man wandering on the downs yonder, looking for the lost memorial of his dead wife, touched her with pity.

In a few minutes more she had caught sight of him at no great distance, coming slowly towards her, with head depressed, and suggesting, as it seemed to her, by his very gait the distress and melancholy of his mind. Presently he looked up, probably for the return of Davey, and perceived her waving her handkerchief towards him—a signal which the female oracle of the *Ultramarine* would have reprobated exceedingly; to her it would have seemed only one step short of 'throwing the handkerchief.' The sign, as Ella intended it, was at once understood; the bowed figure straightened itself, and came on towards her at greatly increased speed.

'I have found it, Mr. Aird!' she cried, as he got within hailing distance; 'your locket is quite safe.'

She held the trinket out to him, and fixing his eyes on it, without even glancing at her, he took it from her hand and pressed it to his lips. 'Thank Heaven,' he exclaimed fervently, 'thank Heaven!' then, turning to her with a look of tender gratitude, strange to see on his lined and dusky face, he added, 'And thank *you*, Miss Josceline, who are Heaven's messenger.'

Extravagant as were his words, it was evident they were not spoken in the way of compliment; the tears were in the old man's eyes as he uttered them.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. AIRD'S LOVE STORY.

So intense was Mr. Aird's emotion that Ella, unwilling to be the witness of what he might afterwards feel to be a weakness, was about to turn back and leave him; but he stopped her with a gesture of his hand.

'Do not go, dear, good young lady; you must not go till I have thanked you. I cannot say how much sorrow you have saved me; my child told you what had happened, I conjecture, and having found the locket where I hoped, yet hardly dared to hope, I had left it, you came yourself to save him so long a walk.'

'I wish I had, Mr. Aird,' she answered, smiling; 'but the fact is the locket was not in your room, and, as Davey seemed so distressed at the loss of it, I came back with him to look for it. I wish I could have spared him the

fatigue, but he was necessary as a guide, you see; and I have left him safe enough, though very tired, poor little fellow, beside a rock in the Creek yonder.'

'Then you have come all this way with him to look for this?'

'Well, it was not so very far; but my fear was that you had dropped it on the sands, as indeed you did.'

'Then but for you,' said the old man with a glance over the cliff, 'the tide would have covered it by this time. Did you open the locket, Miss Josceline?'

'I? Certainly not,' said Ella, with a little flush.

'Then, if you don't mind sitting here for a few minutes, you shall see it now; I owe it to you, or rather to myself, in explanation of the weakness I have shown, and the exhibition of which I know you would have spared me. This is the portrait of my darling wife, and the mother of my only child.'

He placed the open locket in her hand. The picture it contained was the portrait of a

young woman anything but beautiful; the face, indeed, was slightly pitted with the small-pox; the blue eyes were soft and gentle, but they conveyed the idea of one who has suffered much. The expression was one of serene content, as of one who, having known what it is to live and endure, has found, deservedly, her home in heaven.

'It is a sweet-looking face indeed,' said Ella.

'Yes; but not pretty. It is seldom, though I have seen it once,' said the old man, softly, 'that to those who have the gift of beauty, God also adds that of gentleness and goodness. When I first saw it, there was no attraction in that face for me. Her name was Edith Trenton; I went out to India with her, in the same ship, and also with her cousin, another Edith, and bearing the same surname; and that second Edith was my first love. I was a poor man then, and she was poor also; very literally her face was her fortune. The gossips on board said she had come out to India as being the best market for it. To me such talk was blas-

phemy, but I had no right to resent it. I felt that a union between her and me was impossible. She had been brought up in luxury, and I had nothing to offer her except my love; I therefore strove to conceal it; if I did not do so it was no fault of mine, yet I believe she guessed it. We parted at Calcutta; she and her cousin had a home there which had been offered them by her aunt, the widow of a rich civilian; and I went my way to my work, hundreds of miles up the country. I had at that time no prospects; but the chief English resident of the place where I was stationed and my immediate superior, in a few months died suddenly, and, to my astonishment and delight, I was offered his post. The delight was mainly caused by the conviction that I was now in a position to declare my love for Edith. I wrote to her immediately announcing the good fortune that had happened to me, assuring her how in secret I had always worshipped her, explaining the reasons that had hitherto kept me silent, and expressing a hope, from certain signs I had construed in my favour, that she was not altogether indifferent to

me. In case this was so, as I prayed it might be, I ventured to beg her to come to me, as I could not go to her, and I enclosed an invitation from the wife of the English chaplain of my district that she should be her guest till we were married.

'In course of post I received a letter from Edith that filled my soul with joy. She acknowledged that she had always loved me, though she protested, with what I took for woman's coyness, that she had been in doubt as to whether her love was reciprocated. As she had now no doubt, and as she felt she could not do too much to promote my wishes in return for the happiness my letter had given her, she acceded to my proposal of coming up the country and taking advantage of the hospitality that had been offered her. She also candidly owned that her home in Calcutta was not a pleasant one, and that she felt no regrets at leaving it. I have got that letter now, dear to me as on the day when it promised me possession of my beautiful bride, but in the meantime I confess I have looked at it with other

eyes. Edith Trenton arrived in due course; but imagine my chagrin and embarrassment on finding that it was not my Edith, but her cousin. I don't suppose that any man was ever placed in circumstances so perplexing and painful; my first duty, however, I felt, was to save an unprotected and orphan girl from the distress of mind that must ensue upon her discovery of such a mistake. Fortunately her arrival was earlier by some hours than had been expected, and the chaplain kindly rode out to me to the village where I was engaged upon my duties to inform me of it.

'"How is she looking?" cried I rapturously; "and is she not charming?"

'"Yes," said he, "she is charming. She has a sweet expression."

'"But is she not beautiful?" I reiterated, with a lover's pride. "I thought you admired dark beauties."

'"I don't call Miss Trenton dark," said he; "and to be candid with you, my dear fellow, I think love has blinded you to her mere physical charms; she has, however, as it seems to me,

the beauty of the soul, which is far better; she sent you her dear love, and, by-the-by, she gave me this letter which she thought would give you pleasure to read as you came along."

'The letter was from *my* Edith, wishing me every happiness on my approaching union. She herself, she said, had been married some six weeks to a Captain Pipon—which, of course, was the reason why my letter had been placed in her cousin's hands, instead of her own. For the moment I was stunned, but all the time I was riding home—though my companion ascribed my taciturnity to a very different cause—I was schooling myself to adopt such a behaviour as should prevent this poor girl's eyes being opened to the real state of the case. As her cousin was another's, it did not seem to me much matter whether I was married or not; while the difference to Miss Trenton would be prodigious. I never could send her back to Calcutta, scorned and miserable, to be the object of ridicule to society, and an unwelcome burden replaced upon the shoulders of her aunt. Moreover, although I had, as I thought, only paid

her the usual attentions of a gentleman upon the voyage out, I now remembered that they had been accepted very graciously. She had doubtless taken them for more than I had intended; while I, on the other hand, had underrated her kindly feelings towards myself. I am thankful to say that from the moment when I gave her my first kiss of welcome, to that in which I pressed my lips to her dear eyes closed in death, she was never undeceived.'

'You behaved well and nobly, Mr. Aird,' said Ella; 'and I am sure you were repaid for it.'

'My dear young lady, I was repaid ten thousand fold. In a little while my wife taught me to love her for herself, and after a time to adore her. I never envied Captain Pipon his prize. Day by day, and week by week, I grew to love my Edith more and more, till Fate, jealous as it seemed that a mere mortal—and it must be owned an unworthy one—should enjoy such happiness, snatched my darling from me. Davey is all that is now left to me of her save this portrait, which your

great kindness has preserved to me. I would rather have lost a limb than have been deprived of it.'

To Ella, who beheld his face as it bent rapturously over his restored treasure, it was easy to believe his words.

'And did Mrs. Pipon ever know?' inquired Ella.

The old man smiled as he looked up at her.

'You are, I perceive, a daughter of Eve, after all,' he said. 'Yes, she did. Of that I am sure, though no one else could have been. Neither to me, nor to any other person, did she ever breathe one word of that mistake which might have been so fatal. She was not one to boast of her triumphs. I did not need to know *you*, Miss Josceline, to be assured that all women are not like those down yonder.' And he pointed disdainfully in the direction of the hotel.

'Our friends at the *Ultramarine* may be better folks at heart, Mr. Aird, than you imagine,' said Ella, smiling. 'It is only manner——'

'You may just as well say,' interrupted the old man, impatiently, 'that my lined and wrinkled face is no indication of loss and trouble —not to mention of testiness of disposition, a duplicate liver, and general unsuitableness for civilised society. Your politeness will not allow that? Well, then, you may just as well say that your own sweet face is no exponent of the gentleness and goodness of the heart within. But you look pale; I fear you are tired with your long walk; you did not, I do hope, come out before you had had your lunch?'

'I don't think that two hours of abstinence will do me much harm,' replied Ella, smiling. But, in fact, though hitherto excitement had supported her, she was both fatigued and faint. 'Let us go down to poor Davey, who will begin to think himself deserted.'

'True; the darling boy!' said the old man, tenderly. But, though he spoke of his child, there was another who now shared his anxieties.

'No, you must not go down, dear young lady. That will be an unnecessary fatigue.

Walk slowly on along the cliff, and I will join you with the child. It is selfish of me to ask you to wait for us; but old Indians, as you must have heard, are always selfish, and I cannot deprive myself of the rare pleasure of your company.'

Certainly if Mrs. Armytage had beheld him, as he thus addressed her young friend in the tenderest of tones, she would have ejaculated, 'Well, I never!' at the very least. For her own part, Ella would have preferred to get home at once, where she knew her father would be waiting for her with some anxiety; but she could hardly refuse Mr. Aird so small a favour. She waited accordingly for him and Davey, her mind occupied with that strange story of the two Ediths, at which—though it had such strong points of humour about it—the manner of the narrator had overcome in her all temptation to smile.

Love, it seemed, then, was more Protean than she had imagined. It did not assume one shape only. It was not always necessary to fall over head and ears into it; you might gradually

slip into it with the same result! How different Mr. Aird's experience had been from all she had heard and read of it! In what unlooked-for places, it seemed, was to be found Romance! The very last man in the world whom she would have credited with a love story was this man. How strange it was, too, that one so reticent should have thus made her his confidante, and that without laying any injunction of secrecy on her! Of course she would never tell it to any one who would speak of it again, but she knew her father was to be trusted; he was a man who could discourse upon an infinity of topics, and was therefore never driven to do so upon those which were inopportune or indiscreet. She thought she would tell him what she had heard, for two reasons: first, because it would lead him to think kindly of Mr. Aird, in whom she herself now felt a strong personal interest; and, secondly, because the recital might make him speak of his own past and his own love. Why was it that he never spoke of her mother about whom she longed to hear, yet did not dare to inquire? What was it that sealed his

lips? She had often thought of this before with a certain feeling of discomfort and apprehension. It was a subject that attracted her, but, somehow or other, one she never dared to dwell upon. The same feeling possessed her now, and it was almost a relief to her when the thread of her thoughts was broken by the appearance of Mr. Aird and Davey.

'So,' said the former, softly, as soon as he recovered breath from the ascent, 'I find that, though Miss Josceline went without her luncheon to-day, she took care to provide some for her little companion.'

'It was not much of a lunch,' said Ella laughing; 'we had only some dry biscuits, had we, Davey?'

'*I* had some; I was so hungry that I eat 'em all myself,' said the child naïvely; 'you had none, Ella.'

'Ella, indeed!' exclaimed Mr. Aird. 'Why don't you say "Miss Josceline," Master Impudence?'

'She told me to say Ella, papa; it's prettier, and I like it far better.'

'Oh, it's prettier, no doubt,' laughed Mr. Aird; 'very pretty! But I can imagine somebody whom you and I know, Miss Josceline, observing if she heard it, "What a very ill-mannered, forward child!"'

The imitation of Mrs. Armytage's tone was not very accurate, but it was recognisable. Mr. Aird generally treated her in her absence with silent contempt; but he was evidently in the best of spirits, and, as it seemed to Ella, coming out in a new character in all directions.

'Well, my dear Davey,' he continued, cheerfully, 'you are stepping out like a little man. I should never have guessed that you had walked twice over this ground already.'

'I didn't walk back, papa; I felt very tired, so Ella carried me pick-a-back almost all the way.'

'Pick-a-back?' exclaimed the old gentleman in amazement. 'What, did you *carry* the child? But I need not ask. I will not say you carried him on your shoulders, Miss Josceline, but between your pinions.'

'For a gentleman who never pays compli-

ments, as I have heard you say yourself, Mr. Aird,' said Ella, laughing, 'that is very pretty.'

'I am glad you think so,' said the old man, quietly; 'but it is not a compliment, my dear young lady; for that you are an angel is the simple truth—— See, there's your father on the hotel terrace with the telescope. He is sweeping the landscape for his sunbeam.'

Apparently he found it; for presently they saw him coming out to meet them.

'Mr. Josceline,' said Mr. Aird, gravely, as he drew near, 'I owe you an apology for having deprived you so long of your daughter's society, and if I were in your place I should not easily accept it. But she has been engaged in a work of true Christian charity, I do assure you.'

'If she has done you any service, Mr. Aird, I am sure I do not grudge you her company,' was the gracious reply.

'She has done me a very great service, Mr. Josceline,' answered the other, earnestly; 'and, though it may be but an indifferent exchange for losing your good company even for an hour,

she has made of the humble individual who addresses you a friend for life.'

It was curious, though Mr. Aird had the same intention—namely, of conveying his gratitude—how different was his expression of it from what it had been to Ella herself; it had then been natural, it was now formal and stilted; notwithstanding which, strange to say, he conferred at least as much pleasure in the one case as he had in the other.

'One would be really almost inclined to think,' was Mr. Josceline's private reflection, 'that, after all, there is such a thing as a special Providence.'

Except for a certain complacency, however, which he could not altogether banish from his countenance, he showed no sign of exultation at the way which Ella had evidently made in Mr. Aird's good graces. He even affected to treat the matter with the same light-hearted indifference with which he received—or appeared to receive—all other tidings.

'Why, Ella, you little puss,' he said, as soon as they were alone, and while she was

partaking of the meal of which she really stood in need in their own apartment; what spell have you been throwing round our friend, Mr. Aird, that has thus enchanted him?'

'It is only that I had the opportunity of doing him a slight service,' she answered modestly.

'It seems to have been a "secret service," then; for he was evidently disinclined to talk about it,' replied Mr. Josceline. 'Of course, if it is anything very delicate and confidential,' he added, airily, 'I must not be too curious.'

'Well, it *was* something delicate, or rather, which had reference to a delicate matter, papa; yet I don't think he would mind your knowing it, if it went no further.' And then she told him the whole story.

'It is most interesting, I am sure, my dear Ella,' was his remark when she had quite concluded—and indeed he had listened to her with a patience and attention which he seldom awarded to long narratives from anybody—'and I need not say that by me this revelation of Mr. Aird's domestic romance will be held

sacred. To my mind it does him infinite credit. Gad! it must have been rather embarrassing for him when the blonde arrived (*not* "per invoice") instead of the brunette, eh?'

'Oh, papa; don't laugh. If you had seen poor Mr. Aird's face when he was telling me about it!'

'I'm glad I didn't, my dear; it's not everybody that has your command of countenance. How very much in love the chaplain's wife must have thought him, to have described the young lady so much above her physical merits! I am not laughing now, Ella. I only allowed myself to imagine the situation for one fleeting instant. I think it was most laudable, and showed the man—for one thing—to be a thorough gentleman.'

'Mr. Aird is certainly that, papa.'

'It struck me so the moment I set eyes on him; his constant solicitude for his boy, too, convinced me that he had a tender heart. The poor boy is very delicate; I should almost doubt,' added Mr. Josceline, reflectively, 'his ever living to grow up.'

'Oh, papa; don't talk like that! It would break his father's heart. And Davey is such a charming child.'

'Just so; and he is evidently as attached to you as though you were his second mother. Both father and son have excellent taste, that's certain.'

'But it made me quite uncomfortable, papa, to hear Mr. Aird express his thanks; they were so out of all proportion to the service rendered.'

'Such a conviction, my dear,' returned Mr. Josceline, earnestly, 'is the unfailing index of a generous nature. But, at the same time, it is not everybody who would have walked for miles on a day like this, and gone without their lunch, too, to oblige a comparative stranger. He feels, no doubt, as though he could never do enough for you—and quite right too.'

'My dear papa!'

'The fact is, my dear Ella, you don't appreciate your own position. If a young man had done it, it would have been nothing, or next to nothing; if a girl like Miss Jennynge had done it (though, as a matter of fact, she

would have seen him at York first), it would have been civil, and that's all; but for you——'

'Well, really, papa,' interrupted Ella, laughing, 'I don't see why the action was more meritorious in my case than it would have been in hers.'

'That is just what I complain of; you do not understand your own superiority. Now, Mr. Aird, I am happy to say, did. He knows that nature intended you not to run on errands, but to have services rendered you by other people. He is a man whose judgment I applaud, and whose virtues I revere. You may depend upon it, Ella, that man was an excellent husband.'

'I feel sure of that, papa.'

'He didn't fall in love with his wife, you see, at first sight—though he indulged in that folly with somebody else, which came, as it almost always does come, to nothing—but he grew to love her day by day, and year by year. That is the true secret of married happiness.'

'I suppose it is,' said Ella, thoughtfully. She was wondering what was the secret of

her father's marriage, and whether that had resulted in happiness or not. His present vein of philosophy was altogether new to her, nor did she understand its purport.

'Then, another thing which strikes me as an important feature in Mr. Aird's case,' he continued, 'and which should be a lesson to all young people, is that Duty itself proved the gateway to Love, though it did not seem at first to lead thither. The whole story is, in fact, not only, as I have said, most interesting, but also most noteworthy; and now, dear, that you have had your lunch, and listened so patiently to my sermon, you can run upstairs and take off your bonnet.'

Mr. Josceline had an idea that young women were more given to reflection in their own rooms than elsewhere; and he had his reasons for giving his daughter an opportunity for thinking over what he had said to her, and perhaps of giving it a personal application.

CHAPTER XXI.

ILLNESS IN THE HOTEL.

On the way to her room, Ella met Davey's ayah—a black nurse called Abra, who, with the servants at the *Ultramarine*, was the cause of as great excitement (not unmingled in their case with alarm) as were Mr. and Miss Josceline to their masters and mistresses; she looked as white as a black woman could, and in a state of extreme agitation. 'Oh, mees,' she cried, 'Masser Davey is taken ill; I am going for his papa.'

'But you have surely not left the child alone?'

'No, no; a kind lady is with him,' and she pointed to the nursery door, and fled downstairs as fast as the peculiarity of her attire—which resembled a night-dress over a dressing-gown—would permit.

By Davey's bedside was Mrs. Wallace, whom the nurse had called in to her assistance. It was not unusual for the child to be put to bed in the day-time, but on this occasion it was clear that he was not fit to be anywhere else; his little face was pinched with pain, and his little hands like coals of fire.

'I am better now,' he answered to Ella's affectionate inquiry; 'but I was cold and my teeth did chatter so that Abra was frightened. Now I'm quite warm.'

Mrs. Wallace and Ella interchanged meaning looks. 'Davey is a little over-tired,' said the former, assuringly; 'papa will come up and kiss him, and then he will go off to sleep, and wake up quite well.'

'My head, my head!' moaned the little patient, whom this agreeable programme seemed utterly to fail to cheer.

'Is it fever?' inquired Ella in a whisper.

'Yes; no doubt. I think, dear Miss Josceline, if you sent for Dr. Cooper at once it would be our best plan.'

'Let Ella stay here; I like Ella,' murmured

the child. 'I like you too, Mrs. Wallace,' he added, and it was plain the effort to be thus considerate cost him something; 'but Ella is so pretty.'

'He is quite right,' said Mrs. Wallace, smiling. 'It would be a waste to send Ella on a message when an ugly old woman like me could do it just as well; would it not, Davey?'

''Es it would,' said Davey. And the kind old face (which had beauty in it too—for wiser eyes) gave place to the young one beside his pillow.

She returned presently with the ayah, and the news that Mr. Aird had gone out immediately after luncheon, and was not to be found. It was unusual for him to do so; but, as Ella guessed, his feelings having been deeply moved by the recital of the morning, he had probably preferred to pass an hour or two somewhere in solitude.

The child dropped into an uneasy slumber, in which he continued till the Doctor came. Mrs. Wallace explained to him in a few words what had happened, and then he proceeded to make his professional examinations.

Davey cried a little on being woke—which with him was itself a sign of mischief, for the child was not given to tears—but presently dropped off again.

'What is it, Doctor?' whispered Mrs. Wallace.

'If you want a name for it, my dear madam,' was the reply, 'I could give you half a dozen very fine ones; but, the fact is, one cannot tell what is the matter yet. We shall know better in a few hours. Whatever it may be that threatens him, he is very delicate, and will want careful and intelligent nursing'—and he looked doubtfully at the ayah.

'I am an excellent nurse,' said Mrs. Wallace; 'or, at all events,' she added, with characteristic modesty, 'I ought to be, if experience is of any value.'

'It is of inestimable value,' said the Doctor; 'but have you no one to ask leave of in the matter?'

'Not in a case like this,' she answered confidently. 'My husband, I know, will have but one answer to such a request.'

'Ella, Ella! don't leave me, Ella!' moaned the sick child, in a half dream.

'She is here, my darling,' said Ella, softly, and was leaning down to kiss him, when the Doctor interposed.

'Do not do that, Miss Josceline. There is no knowing what mischief may be in store for the little lad; though, on the other hand,' he added, with sudden cheerfulness, 'after a few hours' refreshing sleep he may wake up quite himself again.'

This last sentence was put in very dexterously. He had heard a hurried footstep behind, and guessed rightly to whom it belonged, namely to Mr. Aird himself.

The ex-Commissioner's face was a picture of woe and terror, and, as he stood at the foot of the little bed, he looked five years older than he had looked a few hours before.

'Do not wake him, Mr. Aird,' said the Doctor; 'the less excitement he has the better; while sleep is, on the other hand, the best of medicines.'

'But you were speaking of mischief,'

returned the other, in an anxious whisper. 'What is that you fear for my—my darling!'

'Well; he has, in my judgment—they may pass off, you know, but still he has them—some premonitory symptoms of fever.'

'What! Scarlet fever?'

'Hush! pray control yourself, Mr. Aird, or you will do harm where you would most repent it. I don't know what fever at present; but, as it may be of a contagious kind, I had just forbidden this young lady to kiss the child.'

Mr. Aird turned his eyes to Ella, and apparently became conscious of her presence for the first time; his face wore a look of confusion so much more than of recognition even then, that the Doctor proceeded to explain matters.

'These two ladies,' he said, smiling, 'I found, like a couple of angels, guarding this little fellow's pillow. Mrs. Wallace here, having, she tells me, had experience in illness, has kindly volunteered to nurse him. He will want nursing, and I cannot say I have any very responsible person to recommend in the village.

'God bless you!' said Mr. Aird, fervently, his eyes glancing gratefully at Mrs. Wallace, and then reverting to his child's face.

'There must be another sick nurse also,' continued the Doctor, 'whom I can provide; though I could hardly have put her in sole charge. It is a pity she is not younger, because with young people——'

'Ella! don't leave me, Ella!' repeated Davey, in the same half unconscious, half pleading tones.

'I am not going to leave you, darling,' she replied; then turning to the Doctor, she added, 'You see the child has a fancy for my presence, Dr. Cooper, which in his state I am sure should not be crossed. It is true that I am unaccustomed to nursing—or, indeed, to do anything useful—but I am most willing, and you must let me try my best.'

'It would never do, Miss Josceline;' answered the Doctor; 'it would place too great a responsibility upon my shoulders. Mrs. Wallace, having her husband's consent in the matter, is her own mistress; but you don't

know what you are asking. At this very moment I have my doubts whether I ought not to order you from the room.'

'Do you think I am afraid of the fever?' inquired Ella, scornfully.

'I am sure you are not,' said the Doctor, patting her on the shoulder. 'You look to me as if you would be afraid of nothing except doing wrong.'

'And that I should be doing if I left this child after he has asked me to stay and nurse him,' said Ella, earnestly. 'See how his little hand clasps mine?'

The Doctor could see it; but Mr. Aird could not, because his eyes were filled with tears.

'But, my dear young lady,' said the Doctor, 'you are not, I repeat, like Mrs. Wallace, here, the mistress of your own actions. Your father, whom I have the honour to know, must be consulted in the matter; and I honestly tell you that, in my opinion, he would be fully justified in saying "No." Mr. Aird himself will, I am sure, take the same view.' For the first time the old Indian removed his anxious eyes from

the sleeping boy, and fixed them elsewhere—on Ella.

'Miss Josceline,' he said, 'I feel your kind offer as I do that of Mrs. Wallace; my heart is too full to express how much. In her case, I accept it; in yours, I dare not. If anything should happen to you through—through Davey —— She has no business to be here, Doctor, as it is, has she?'

'She has not,' replied the Doctor, decisively.

'Hush!' said Ella, 'would you have me wake the child? Do you not see he has his hand in mine?'

Nothing more was said just then on that point. Dr. Cooper objected to the room as being too small in case of sickness, and recommended the little patient's removal into another apartment; and, having left divers other directions behind him, presently went home to make up his prescription.

In the meantime the news that Davey Aird had been taken ill, with a fever that might possibly prove infectious, spread, with the swiftness of contagion itself, over the whole house.

Mrs Trant, the landlady, though secretly almost beside herself with apprehension, maintained her usual philosophic demeanour, and made arrangements for preparing the Prior's room, as it was called, for the patient's reception; it formed one of two or three apartments, entitled the 'Hostel,' cut off by a long passage from the rest of the house, and practically isolated from it. Even if it should please God to visit the child and her own establishment with such a calamity as scarlet fever—which was far from being likely, for the place was health itself—all danger, she averred, would be confined to that locality.

This view of the case, however, it was difficult for Mrs. Trant to persuade her guests at the *Ultramarine* to share. Mrs. Armytage—who, however, was no coward, and did not dream of flight—expressed her opinion that scarlet fever the malady would turn out to be, nor was it to be wondered at that a child who was allowed to sit down to a late dinner with grown-up people every night should sooner or later have contracted some such malady.

On the other hand, Mrs. Jennynge immediately began to pack up; the idea of infection suggested death, which even the prospect it afforded of her being reunited to her beloved Nathaniel failed to rob of its terrors. Her daughter said nothing either for or against departure; the peril did not much alarm her; and if the report was true that Miss Josceline, for some inscrutable reason of her own, had volunteered to be the child's sick nurse, she hoped in her absence to regain that supremacy as 'leading young lady' in the hotel drama of which Ella's arrival had undoubtedly robbed her. Moreover, she knew that the case was one in which opposition could have been of no avail. In some things—mostly small ones—her mother was submissive to her; in others she was not to be guided; and having the absolute charge of the purse strings, was far less to be coerced.

The suspected bride was not inclined without good reason to leave her present quarters. It was not often that she had the opportunity of dining every day with an Honourable; and

Mr. Josceline, who had a very pleasant way with all ladies, and especially with young and pretty ones, was really a favourite of hers. If small-pox had been in the air she would have fled within the hour; but scarlet fever, at the worst, did not disfigure one.

As for the gentlemen, the Professor had been for weeks in search of a butterfly with green wings, reported by the 'Entomologist' to be in the neighbourhood of Wallington, the pursuit of which had already entailed on him several severe colds, an acute attack of rheumatism, and a sprained ankle, and whose capture would have more than repaid him for fifty fevers. Mr. Percival Lott was not a man to trouble himself about diseases of any kind; and, provided that no epidemic was so virulent as to deprive the billiard table of its usual complement of pool players, it was free, so far as he was concerned, to run its course, and welcome. Mr. Wallace had a cheerful confidence that Emma (his wife) knew what she was about, and might be safely left to the guidance of her own judgment; if she thought it right to nurse

the little lad, it was sure to *be* right. And as for infectious disorders—with the exception of the foot-and-mouth disease, with which it appeared nobody was threatened—they were the Doctor's business, and not his.

Mr. Josceline—who, thanks to the dignity of his position, was the last to be informed of the impending calamity—had it broken to him in a very unexpected manner. Ella's prolonged delay above stairs had not disturbed him; indeed, he was rather pleased at it than otherwise, for he flattered himself she was giving her attention in her own apartment to the subject he had so delicately dropped into her mind. He was solacing himself for her absence with smoking cigarettes and perusing his favourite author, when there was a knock at the door—much louder than that modest tap which Phœbe the neat-handed was wont to administer—and in walked Dr. Cooper. Mr. Josceline honestly liked the man, and also, situated as he was, felt the advantage of making friends with him in many ways.

'I am delighted to see you, Doctor,' he

said, 'and the more so because I don't want you—I mean professionally. This is really kind.'

'I am sorry to say, however, Mr. Josceline,' returned the other smiling gravely, 'that my visit has a professional character. The fact is—though the danger may pass away—the *Ultramarine* is threatened with something very serious—a case of fever.'

'Drains, of course,' replied Mr. Josceline. 'All these old houses are deficient in their sanitary arrangements.'

'I don't know the cause at present, though I don't think it is anything local; little Davey Aird is down with some sort of fever.'

'I am truly sorry to hear it, both for his own and father's sake.' And for the moment Mr. Josceline was really sorry. He had, it is true, speculated vaguely in his own mind upon delicate little Davey's being removed from this world of sorrow; but many of us do the like without actually wishing the object of our calculations any harm.

'Yes; Mr. Aird is, of course, dreadfully

distressed and anxious. My errand here, however, concerns you more nearly. When the child was taken ill it seems your daughter was called to his assistance; and she is even now by his bedside.'

'Good gracious! But is not that dangerous?'

'Well; let us hope not. I will not conceal from you, however, that she has incurred —*has* incurred, mark me—a certain risk, although a small one.'

'But why, in Heaven's name, does she not come away?'

'Well; the fact is, she is stopping there—in Heaven's name; that is, out of her natural goodness and kindness of heart. The child is evidently attached to her, and she is loth to leave him. Mr. Aird, of course, is deeply grateful, but is sufficiently unselfish to regard the matter from what, I presume, will be your own point of view. She has volunteered with that excellent Mrs. Wallace—who, between ourselves, is worth all the other women here put together, though they think her such small

beer—to nurse the child. That is, of course, with your permission. If the case should turn out to be a serious one, there will be undoubtedly risk. But in that event, as I have said, some risk has been already incurred by her having been in such close proximity with the little patient.'

'Has Mr. Aird sent you to ask my leave?'

'Nay, I cannot say that; it would have been highly improper of him, in my opinion, to make such a request; your consent, of course, would lay him under an eternal obligation; but I have come, as was my duty, to learn for myself your view of the matter. It is for you, and you only, to decide. The actual peril, though very appreciable, is, after all, remote; but it will very likely become necessary to isolate the case, and thereby deprive you for some time of Miss Josceline's society. Mr. Aird's last words to me were, "It is too much to ask of anybody;" and it is certainly a great deal to ask.'

Mr. Josceline turned away from his companion—an act of discourtesy which, unless in

anger, he had never committed in his life—and gazed thoughtfully out of the open window, as though seeking the reply that was expected of him from sky and sea.

'In case I accede to this,' he answered, presently, 'is my daughter to be removed from me now, from this moment? Am I not to see her?'

'Of course, Mr. Josceline, I cannot prevent your seeing her, but I think it would be highly injudicious. At present we know the extent of probable infection, if infection there should be. It is limited to four persons; for doctors, you know, are like Old Bailey attorneys, who notwithstanding the immorality of their clients, always remain pure and good, neither catching anything themselves nor communicating it to others.'

That Mr. Josceline had no smile for this, showed how deeply he was moved by the thoughts within him.

'I owe it to Mrs. Trant and to her lodgers,' continued the visitor, 'that the danger should be minimised as much as possible. I would

prefer you not to see Miss Josceline—since to do so would give me another cause for anxiety —unless you have resolved to forbid her to carry out her present intention. If, on the other hand, you are prepared to permit it——'

'I *am* prepared,' interrupted Mr. Josceline, suddenly. 'I have quite made up my mind. I think it would be wrong of me to step between my daughter and an act of Christian charity. Tell her, with my dear love, that she has my full permission to nurse the child.'

The other gazed at him with an admiration that was not, however, unmixed with some surprise.

'Such a determination does you honour, Mr. Josceline; it is one that few fathers—with a daughter so dear to them, as I know Miss Josceline is to you—could have brought themselves to entertain. She will, I am sure, be most grateful for your consent; and as for Mr. Aird——'

Mr. Josceline waved his hand as though that consideration was of small consequence indeed, as compared with other matters, and

also to indicate that he wished to be alone—as, indeed, he did.

'I will leave you, sir,' continued the Doctor, gravely, 'to your own thoughts, which should be happy ones if the reflection of having performed a noble and unselfish action can give happiness.' And with a cordial grasp of his large hand he left Mr. Josceline to his meditations.

These were not altogether of the kind that his visitor had anticipated; though, on the whole, as he had hinted, they conferred considerable satisfaction.

'I am right, I am surely right,' murmured Mr. Josceline to himself; 'such an opportunity as this should not be let slip. My time is short; the risk is small; the prize is great.'

CHAPTER XXII.

THE INVITATION.

THE company at the *table-d'hôte* that day were much diminished in numbers. Some intending lodgers who had arrived at the hotel, on hearing that there was risk of fever, had instantly taken their departure, so that there were no new recruits; while the absence of Ella and of Mr. Aird and of his son from one side of the table, and of Mrs. Wallace from the other, made very melancholy gaps. Felspar and Vernon, in consequence of the latter's ailment, also failed to present themselves, so the guest-roll at the *Ultramarine* was limited to eight persons. This, however, had the effect of making them more like a family party than ever, while the subject of conversation, being of course little Davey's illness, drew them in some respects still nearer

together by reason of its unusual seriousness. The degrees of acquaintanceship vary less in proportion to the frequency of meeting than of our common interest in the matters discussed. This circumstance, it is true, did not mitigate the hostile feeling between Mrs. Armytage and Mrs. Jennynge; they were Irreconcilables, and would have quarrelled on the same raft after a shipwreck; but it made the relations with each of these ladies and the rest of the party decidedly more close and familiar. All, too, were agreed that the conduct of the grand-daughter of the Earl of Boroughby in exposing herself to the dangers of infection for the sake of little Davey was above all praise. Miss Jennynge was especially loud in her commendations, which were also so far genuine that she thought Ella could not have done better than have thus cut herself off from society, and left her (Anastasia) in possession of the field.

'I only hope,' said Mrs. Armytage, 'that Miss Josceline will find herself repaid; but I am afraid our Indian friend is not very gracious, while the poor child—though, indeed, it is not

his fault—is sadly spoilt, and likely to turn out a very troublesome patient.'

'I hope,' said Mr. Josceline, smiling gravely, 'that my daughter has no expectation of any reward save that which is derived from the consciousness of having done her duty.'

'I am sure she has not,' said Mrs. Jennynge, eagerly.

'Goodness gracious! what other expectation could she have?' observed Mrs. Armytage, sharply. 'The impudence of the woman,' as she afterwards expressed it, in thus volunteering a corroboration of Mr. Josceline's sentiments, 'really surpassed everything.'

'And in acknowledging Miss Joceline's goodness,' continued Mrs. Jennynge, bent on recommending herself to the attention of the brother of the Earl of Boroughby, 'we must not forget the self-sacrifice which her father has shown in the matter. He has not only exposed his daughter to a frightful risk, but voluntarily deprived himself of her society.'

'In that respect Mr. Wallace has sacrificed himself as much as I have,' said Mr. Josceline, modestly.

'Whatever my wife thinks it right to do *is* right,' observed the farmer, simply, 'and ought to satisfy me.'

'Very proper,' 'a very sensible observation,' 'just so,' murmured the company. They had no objection to Mr. Wallace entertaining such noble sentiments, or any others; but the idea of his supposing his case to be a parallel one with that of the Hon. George Emilius Josceline struck them as absurd to the last degree. Earls' grand-daughters are rare, while the supply of farmers' wives (should anything happen to one of them) is practically unlimited.

'I have just heard from Dr. Cooper,' continued Mr. Wallace, 'that both Mr. Felspar and Mr. Vernon offered their services to him to help nurse the little fellow.'

'Deuced kind of them,' muttered Mr. Percival Lott, twirling his moustaches. 'Let us hope they were not moved to play the part of Good Samaritans by the fact that Miss Josceline had undertakenthat of Miss Nightingale.'

'For shame, Percy!' exclaimed the suspected bride; 'Mr. Josceline will hear you.'

As a matter of fact that gentleman *had* heard him, and, though not a muscle of his countenance betrayed the fact, had done so with considerable interest. Had Mr. Percival Lott winged his random shaft aright, he wondered? If so, he had not taken his own precautions in vain as respected Mr. Vernon; and it might be necessary to take others. His hope was, however, that by the time Ella had finished her engagement as nurse she might have entered into another—of another kind—which would render any further attentions on the part of the young contributor to the 'Mayfair Keepsake' superfluous.

'I think if Mr. Felspar offered his services to nurse little Davey," observed Mrs. Jennynge, indignantly, 'it was very improper of him.'

'One would think you were his mother, ejaculated Mrs. Armytage. 'He is old enough to do as he pleases, I suppose.'

'I said nothing about age, Mrs. Armytage,' answered Mrs. Jennynge, trembling with indignation. 'It is true I am not—as you are so polite as to suggest—his mother; but I am his

employer. He has undertaken to do a certain work for me which it would be quite impossible for him to accomplish if he became a sick nurse.'

'But we thought all that was over,' returned Mrs. Armytage, bluntly.

'All what was over?' exclaimed her rival, shaking like an autumn leaf, and, like it, exceedingly red.

'Why, everything. We heard that you were going away, bag and baggage; frightened out of your wits at the idea of catching the scarlatina.'

Poor Mrs. Jennynge looked as if she had caught it already; yet she felt a sense of relief, too, for when Mrs. Armytage had said 'we thought all that was over,' she had had a dreadful apprehension that she was referring to something more serious than her mere departure, and the idea of which she had secretly begun to entertain in her mind.

'We hear a great many things that are not true,' she observed, with dignity; 'but people of good sense do not repeat them.'

'Hoity toity!' exclaimed Mrs. Armytage, laughing; 'what a fuss about nothing! Are you going to run away from us, or are you not?'

'I have really not quite made up my mind,' answered Mrs. Jennynge.

Upon the whole she preferred Mrs. Armytage's manner when it was downright rude, as in the present case, to when it was merely aggravating; and, moreover, there was a certain reason which caused her to feel satisfaction at having had the fact thus publicly extracted from her, that she was still in doubt as to leaving the hotel. On Mr. Josceline this news had a contrary effect; he had not heard that Mrs. Jennynge had any intention of quitting the *Ultramarine*, and the bare possibility of it discomposed him exceedingly. He contrived, as the ladies left the room, to have a few words with the last of them, who, in the order of exit, was naturally Miss Jennynge.

'I hope this is not true,' he said, with marked concern, 'about your mother's thinking of taking you away from us?'

'I am sure I don't know, Mr. Josceline,' she answered, with a little pout; 'you heard what she said just now. She is still, it seems, in a state of indecision.'

'But you don't wish to go, yourself, I'm sure—or, at least, I hope.' And Mr. Josceline looked down and sighed, as if had been five-and-twenty, and had said too much.

'Well, of course I don't; but in matters of this kind I have no influence with my mother whatever, I do assure you. Now I think a word from *you*.'

'From *me!*' Mr. Josceline looked more surprised than he could express. 'Oh, dear, if you think *that*, I will certainly speak. I confess, my dear Miss Jennynge, I am quite unscrupulous, and actuated solely by selfish motives.'

'*You* selfish? When you have deprived yourself of your daughter's society to benefit others?'

'Yes; but then I thought I should have had it in some measure made up to me; I flattered myself that you and your mother, for

instance, would have made a great deal of me now that I was left alone; that I should be honoured with more of your society; and as for your running away from the hotel and leaving me to the tender mercies of Mrs. Armytage, such an idea never entered into my head. It is what the newspapers call "A Case of Heartless Desertion."'

'Well; I'll tell mamma what you say,' said Anastasia.

'Do,' said Mr. Josceline, boldly; 'and I hope,' added he, in lower tones, 'that I shall not want a kind word from yourself; the kindest you can utter will be "Stay," remember.'

'I'll ask mamma,' said Anastasia, blushing —the phrase she was employing, perhaps, suggested to her the occasion on which it is generally used; and really Mr. Josceline's tone and manner were at once so tender and polite that he seemed to be offering his hand and heart to her upon a silver salver.

Of the manner of his address, however, she said nothing in speaking to her mother, but only conveyed to her the substance of it.

'Mr. Josceline,' she said, 'seems very much amazed at our going away, and says he quite depended on seeing more of us now that he has deprived himself of his daughter's society.'

'Dear me, you don't say so!' replied Mrs. Jennynge, unable to conceal her delight. 'I must say that is very complimentary to us, Statty.'

'He is a gentleman of good birth,' answered the young lady, 'and of course appreciates natural refinement. He sees we are very different—indeed, he said as much—from Mrs. Armytage and Mrs. Lott, and the rest of them. That is only natural. Still, I must confess it is satisfactory.'

Mrs. Jennynge cautiously abstained from saying how very satisfactory she herself felt it to be.

'No doubt, no doubt, my dear,' she answered; 'and since he is alone, and seems as it were to expect it, I think it would be only civil to ask him to take coffee with us this evening here, in our own apartment.'

Anastasia looked about her a little doubt-

fully. One may have the most dutiful and domestic instincts, and yet exercise an independent judgment upon the personal appearance of a parent in a picture or plaster of Paris; and it struck Miss Jennynge that the collection of portraits of her papa, and especially that cast of him behind the screen, was somehow not calculated to impress the Hon. George Emilius Josceline favourably. If her mother began talking to him about them in the usual way, she felt that he would be very far from appreciating it.

'I think it would be only kind to ask Mr. Josceline, mamma,' she answered; 'only, being still a comparative stranger to us, I think it would be injudicious to show him—as you showed his daughter—all these memorials of dear papa; it would look as if we were anxious to place ourselves on a footing of familiarity—as, indeed, we are, you may say, but then I don't know whether such a course of conduct would not in his case have just the contrary effect.'

Anastasia's arguments were slightly con-

fused; and, indeed, she felt some delicacy, as well as difficulty, in expressing them; but, to her great relief, her mother appeared to appreciate the force of them.

'You are right, Anastasia,' she said; 'I will not take Mr. Josceline into that sacred spot' —by which phrase she indicated the folding screen which concealed the *post-mortem* presentment of her husband's features. 'His sweet daughter appreciated the tender privilege I accorded to her, and sympathised with me to the uttermost; but men are so different.'

'Very true, mamma,' said Anastasia, with that sense of relief which we all experience when those who, by the inscrutable arrangements of Fate, have the whip hand of us, show themselves more amenable to reason than we had expected of them. 'I suppose we had better write Mr. Josceline a little note?' She said 'we' because she was generally her mother's amanuensis on such occasions; for spelling, though we are told it comes by nature, does not come all at once; but, like gentlemanliness, commonly takes more than one

generation for its perfection. To Mrs. Jennynge the longer words of our language were like fences, which her pen could not take at a run, but had to compass with caution and with the help of a dictionary.

It was somewhat to the younger lady's surprise, therefore, that her mother replied, 'I will write the note to Mr. Josceline myself, Anastasia, and, in the meantime, just take down a volume or two from the book-case and arrange them on the table—the 'Book of Birth and Beauty,' and 'Whither we are Going'—it will make the room look more like home to him.'

While this judicious selection of literature was being made for Mr. Josceline's entertainment, that gentleman was sitting in his own apartment with a letter from Ella in his hand, which had just been brought in to him by the neat-handed Phœbe.

'I'm feared it smells of smoke, sir,' she said; 'but Mrs. Trant she took it from the young lady with the tongs, and held it ever so long over the still-room fire.'

'To disinfect it, I suppose? quite right,

Phœbe,' said Mr. Josceline, gravely, 'but in future, if your mistress would smoke a cigarette over it as I am doing, it would be a safer plan —I mean as regards the letter.'

'I'll tell her, sir,' returned Phœbe, stolidly. 'And, please, sir, I was to say as Miss Josceline was looking quite well, and didn't expect to catch nothing.'

'I hope she will, nevertheless,' was Mr. Josceline's reflection, as he opened the dispatch.

'My dear papa, how ever can I thank you enough,' it began, 'for sparing me to nurse Davey? If you could see his pleasure— though I am sure I don't know why the child should have taken such a fancy to me—it would well repay you for the loss of my poor society; while, as for Mr. Aird, his gratitude is such that I feel almost afraid of his going down on his knees.'

Here a smile of content stole over the reader's face, and he dropped the letter on his lap, and reclining in his arm-chair gazed on the curling smoke of his cigarette, as was usual with him in moments of reflection.

'Mrs. Wallace is worth her weight in gold, and it is all I can do to secure my fair share of what little work is required of us. She and I occupy what is called the Prior's parlour, which opens into the dormitory, an airy room where little Davey is located with the ayah. Our plan is to take a night-watch alternately; for Abra, though an excellent creature, has "an exposition of sleep" upon her, she tells us, which lasts for eight or nine hours on a stretch, and is not easily broken into. On the other side of the room there is the refectory, where we are to take our meals; and beyond that is Mr. Aird's room, which, at present, however, he has shown no intention to inhabit. It is impossible to get him away from Davey's pillow, though Mrs. Wallace promises it shall be done in due time: it is curious what a force of will has suddenly developed in her—quite as strong as is exhibited by another lady of our acquaintance—but only exercised as it seems, in her case, in behalf of others. You may be quite sure, dear papa, that with good Mrs. Wallace I am in safe hands. Nothing troubles me but the thought that you may

miss me a little bit, though I know how proud and pleased everybody will be to make much of you ; Mrs. Wallace tells me you are such a favourite with all the ladies here that I feel quite jealous. Dr. Cooper has called again, but can say nothing decisive yet; to see poor Mr. Aird hanging upon his words and looks, is quite pitiful. I shall write you a bulletin daily—let us hope there will be but few of them—and I need not say that the greatest blessing to me in quarantine will be a letter from your dear self.

'Your loving daughter,

'ELLA JOSCELINE.'

'That is a good girl,' muttered Mr. Josceline; 'not one in a thousand is like her; no, nor one in ten thousand. To come of such a stock, too! Bah! what rubbish people talk of birth and blood! Not that I ought to blame them—the idiots. What, *another* bulletin, Phœbe?'

'No, sir; leastways, I don't know, sir,' returned the waitress, simply, 'unless you mean a billy-doo; it's from Mrs. Jennynge. I was

to say you were not to trouble to write, but just to say "Yes," or "No."'

'Very good; my compliments, then, and say, I shall have great pleasure.'

It was not often, although so prodigal of smiles in company, that, when he was alone, Mr. Josceline indulged himself in them; but on this occasion he leant back in his chair with Mrs. Jennynge's open note in his hand, and fairly shook with inward merriment.

'Dear Mr. Josceline,—The absence of your charming daughter must be my excuse for asking you to do us the honour of taking coffee with us this evening. Since you are absolutely alone, you may find our society a relief; at least, I myself have sometimes discovered that anything is preferable to solitude and the recollections of the past. I am especially hopeful to see you this evening, since it may be the last—though we have not *quite* made up our minds upon that subject—that we may spend at Wallington Bay. I shall leave it with much regret; but, on the other hand, I hardly like to expose my

dear and only Anastasia to the risk of contagion. You have permitted your sweet daughter, it is true, to expose herself to it, but at her own request, and in the sacred cause of duty. Anastasia's case is different, and I scarce know what to do; there was a time when I had no need to seek for advice, but had it voluntarily proffered by the best of husbands. There is none, alas! to help me in my doubts and troubles now. However, I have no right to intrude such sorrows upon the ear of—I had almost written a stranger, but I must permit myself to substitute—of so recently acquired a friend as yourself. I forget, I am ashamed to say, whether you take cream or hot milk with your coffee, so have ordered both.

'Yours faithfully,

'JANE JENNYNGE.'

'By Jingo, Phœbe was right, and it *is* a *billet doux*,' murmured Mr. Josceline, softly. 'Things are taking a most convenient turn, and in the very nick of time. Pah! How her note smells of india-rubber! And what a lot of

erasures there are in it! The pen-knife must have been instigated, I should imagine, by the dictionary. The whole appearance of the thing reminds me of the "holiday-letter" one wrote at school under the master's eyes; but the composition is *sui generis*, and certainly intended for no eye but mine. What an old fool she is! Never mind,' he sighed—and his gaze fell on the note he had received from Ella—'it is for *your* sake, my darling; and I do not grudge the sacrifice.'

And with a glance in the mirror over the mantelpiece, and another at his 'filbert' nails, he repaired to the widow's sitting room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WIDOW'S RING.

THOUGH young people of both sexes think a good deal about love, they absolutely decline to consider its existence possible between persons of mature age. They admit that the contemporaries of their grandfathers and grandmothers may entertain a tender passion for *them*, and they have even been known to reciprocate it; but they flout the idea of those ancient people having a tenderness for one another. Hence I sometimes flatter myself, when I am inclined to flirt with some young person a third of my age and undoubtedly three times as good-looking, that I am driven to that course of conduct from fear of ridicule. One must flirt with somebody; and though it would be more becoming to select a contemporary, I dare not do it, from dread of what the young folks will say, but pay my

attentions to the prettiest girl I can find as a *pis aller.*

Miss Jennynge had no more idea that Mr. Josceline aspired to her mother's hand, when he accepted her invitation that evening, than that he had a design of possessing himself of the cast of her father's head, or of the collection of his photographs; though she herself would not have objected to becoming his wife for a few years, and the Hon. Mrs. George Emilius Josceline for ever. And that astute gentleman had possessed himself of this tender secret, which she believed to be hidden in her virgin bosom from every eye.

This knowledge, while it imposed upon him considerable difficulties, gave him a great advantage. He knew that any attention he paid to Anastasia would be set down by Mrs. Jennynge to his desire to avert her daughter's suspicions, while her daughter herself would take them *au sérieux.* The killing of two birds with one stone was a metaphor altogether too feeble for this masterly course of conduct. If Mr. Vernon had known of the position—which would have

been excellent 'copy' for him—he would have likened it to getting the self-same article accepted (and paid for) by 'Punch' and the 'Pulpit.'

'We're so glad you're come!' exclaimed Mrs. Jennynge, as she gave him her well-jewelled hand; 'it is so thoughtful and kind of you.'

Thoughtful it might have been, though hardly in the sense in which Mrs. Jennynge intended it. The fact was, the excellent old lady was rather off her head with excitement, and used the first gracious terms that came into it; but the kindness was surely the other way, as Mr. Josceline hastened to say.

'It is very kind of you and your daughter,' he answered, 'to take pity upon my loneliness.'

'We are lonely ourselves,' said Anastasia, 'for now that Miss Josceline has gone there is no attraction for us in the ladies' drawing-room. Mrs. Armytage is more intolerable than ever. You noticed, no doubt, how insolent she was at dinner; well, she has been in tears half the afternoon. Can you possibly guess why, Mr. Josceline?'

'Well, I should hope it was because she heard the rumour of your possible departure.'

'Not she,' said Mrs. Jennynge, at which somewhat blunt sally Mr. Josceline smiled as though it had been the subtlest of epigrams.

'Mrs. Armytage has found in a book from the circulating library,' continued Anastasia, 'a passage which has affected her most distressingly.'

'Dear me; from one of the poets, no doubt,' said Mr. Josceline; 'a delicate nature like hers must be easily unstrung by poetic suggestion.'

'What a wicked man you are!' smiled Mrs. Jennynge admiringly. 'A little bird told me you could be very severe when you pleased, though I refused to believe it.'

It was evident from the colour that came into Anastasia's face that she was the bird in question, but she pursued her narrative without taking any notice of this little digression.

'No, it was not a poetry book' ('Poetry book!' thought Mr. Josceline; 'she's worse than the other!'); 'it was a paragraph from some work on natural history about the dura-

tion of life in animals. "The rhinoceros," she told us, "exists for ever so long, the alligator, except from over-eating itself, scarcely knows what it is to die, but the dog—the faithful dog—attains but rarely to twenty years of life." According to that computation, her "own sweet Fido," as she calls him, has, it seems, only about fifteen years of existence before him, which has put her in a most dreadful state.'

'No wonder,' said Mr. Josceline; 'fifteen years—why, it's a mere span.' His tone was more cynical even than he intended, for he was thinking of "the probabilities" of the duration of his own existence.

'I had it on the tip of my tongue,' continued Anastasia, 'to ask the woman how long she expected to live herself.'

'That would have been very rude, Statty,' said Mrs. Jennynge reprovingly. 'Don't you think so, Mr. Josceline?'

'Well, it would have been slightly personal, no doubt; but the temptation to one who possesses humour must, we must allow, have been considerable. Of the society, however, to be

found in the ladies' drawing-room your daughter appears to be quite independent, if I may judge from these charming flowers. They are nature itself. I was afraid that it was an occupation that had died out with our young ladies—a lost art, like the green tint in painted windows and the exquisite old lace of——'

'They are *mine*!' interrupted Mrs. Jennynge, with modest triumph.

Considering that Mr. Josceline had heard all about this particular manufactory of wax flowers from Ella, the extremity of astonishment manifested in his features was most creditable to him. He looked from Mrs. Jennynge to her violets, and from her violets to Mrs. Jennynge, as though he were doubting which of them was wax, and which the lovely and odorous offspring of nature.

'It is miraculous!' he murmured.

What in reality, however, struck him as much more extraordinary was the spectacle of Anastasia with her thumb in her mouth, which at this moment he beheld in the looking-glass. He was unaware, of course, that this was

equivalent to the hoisting the drum in Admiral Fitzroy's signal system; but he saw by the lowering of her brow that a storm was brewing, and felt he had pushed his compliments to her mother too far. The human mind is able to bear a very considerable weight of personal flattery, but it is often impatient of a penny-weight when the flattery is addressed to a third person.

'I have often thought,' said Mr. Josceline, musing, 'that the combinations of which art is capable have never been sufficiently experimented upon. A picture was shown me the other day of the home garden of a noble friend of mine, with photographs of his family, reduced to the proper comparative size, sitting on the seats and in the arbours. The effect was a little stiff, but the idea seemed to me capable of development. Now why should not these exquisite flowers be made to form a foreground in some beautiful landscape, such as I see on yonder table?'

'It would spoil them both,' said Anastasia curtly.

'Pardon me, my dear young lady,' said Mr. Josceline, taking up the work of art in question and examining it with great minuteness, 'we cannot tell till we have tried. This is a very delicate specimen of the master indeed, and there is no doubt of the master; it is a Birket Foster.'

'Oh, dear no, that's mine,' said Anastasia briskly.

'Yours? You astound me!' ejaculated Mr. Josceline. 'I took it for an original which you had set yourself to copy. Dear me! If my Ella could only paint like this I should never venture to criticise. She told me that you were a most marvellous performer—but really this——'

'I think Anastasia has a natural gift for painting,' observed Mrs. Jennynge.

'Natural gift, my dear madam! It is genius. In your daughter's presence I dare not say what I think of it, and I am thought to have some little taste in these matters too. I am not one to praise, I hope, without discrimination. Now this again'—he took up another specimen—

'has vigour and skill; the trained hand and eye are very perceptible; the execution perhaps is even better; but the conception, the exquisite suggestiveness of the other, is wanting in it.'

'Why, lor bless me!' exclaimed Mrs. Jennynge—'that's Mr. Felspar's. He left it for my daughter to copy. Didn't he, Statty?'

'Yes, that is Mr. Felspar's,' said Anastasia, her countenance beaming with pride and delight, but also, as was usual with her when excited, growing very red in the wrong places.

'Well, all I can say is,' said Mr. Josceline with an air of conviction, 'that in my opinion Mr. Felspar has very little to teach you, my dear Miss Jennynge. What admirable perspective! How softly the distances are made to mingle! This is an unexpected treat indeed.'

The observation of course referred to the picture, but just at that moment the coffee was brought in, which made the application of the remark a little vague.

'Do you take cream or hot milk?' observed Mrs. Jennynge anxiously. 'It was very remiss

in me, as I told you, not to have taken note of that.'

'Indeed, my dear madam, it is very good of you even to profess an interest in my poor tastes and fancies. I take black coffee, thank you.'

'Black coffee!' exclaimed Mrs. Jennynge regretfully. 'I am afraid they have got nothing blacker than this in the house.'

The visitor was here attacked by such a severe cough that it brought the water into his eyes.

'Mr. Josceline means, mamma,' said Anastasia, in that tone of reproach she always used when her mother made a social mistake, 'that he takes his coffee without milk or cream.'

'La, now, I'd just as soon take a black dose,' observed her mother, making a wry face.

'It is an acquired taste, no doubt,' said Mr. Josceline gently. 'We men are the slaves of habit.'

'Ah, I know what that means,' observed his hostess. 'My poor dear Nathaniel always used to use those words in apology for taking

something he was fond of, but which disagreed with him, or which he was afraid I should find fault with, such as a glass of gin and water. If you want a cigarette, Mr. Josceline, pray take one. I don't at all object to smoke.'

'You are an enchantress, Mrs. Jennynge,' exclaimed Mr. Josceline, 'and can read the innermost thoughts of us poor mortals.'

'I think I understand the men,' answered his hostess modestly. 'Get Mr. Josceline a light, Statty.'

'But are you sure *you* don't object to the smell of tobacco, Miss Anastasia?' inquired the visitor with solicitude.

'I like it,' answered the young lady with enthusiasm. After that eulogium upon her water-colour drawings, she would have professed to like the smell of boiling cabbage-water, if that should have been the Hon. George Emilius Josceline's favourite tipple.

From that moment the visitor was on velvet; for such is the gracious influence of tobacco upon the cultivated mind that it strengthens us to endure the society of the

tedious, while at the same time it so admirably matures and elevates the intelligence that we say nothing we ought not to say unless we are quite convinced it would be gratifying to our audience. From that moment Mr. Josceline carried on his little game of three-handed battledore with comparative ease; he gave the shuttlecock to each, not indeed in turn, but after just such an interval as prevented her from growing impatient, while he contrived to convince the other that he was temporarily depriving her of it not willingly, but in order to allay the flame of jealousy, or to extinguish the spark of suspicion. There was one thing, however, which Mr. Josceline was very anxious to effect, but with all his art had hitherto failed to compass. He wished to get rid of Anastasia, and to find himself alone with Mrs. Jennynge. To turn a young lady out of her own drawing-room without assigning any reason for it except that she is *de trop*, is a very difficult operation, as many of us in our youth may have had cause to remember, and this difficulty is greatly increased if she is the rival in our affections with

the remaining occupant of the apartment. It is humiliating to confess the failure of so great a diplomatist, but after a couple of hours of conversation Mr. Josceline had only succeeded in the very easy task of charming his hearers, and was as far off from the object with which he had sought their society as when he began.

'I am afraid I must be going,' he said, 'for though I could sit up all night in such society, I should suffer for it (as one suffers for all one's pleasures, alas!) to-morrow. Late hours for the present are forbidden to me.'

'How one hates doctors!' observed Anastasia with a gentle sigh.

'It would be a mitigation of their severe sentence,' continued the visitor, 'if I might take that landscape of yours away with me—not to keep, of course.'

'I am sure you are very welcome to it, said Anastasia earnestly.

Here an outbreak of jealousy might not without reason have been expected from Mrs. Jennynge. On the contrary, that lady smiled her sweetest smile, and in her tenderest voice

exclaimed: 'No, my dear Anastasia, I cannot permit you to give Mr. Josceline that picture when you have the lovely Como landscape to give him instead; it would give him a much better impression of your talents.'

'But the Como is upstairs, mamma,' pouted Anastasia, 'at the bottom of the trunk.'

'Never mind. I am sure you will not grudge a little trouble for our friend Mr. Josceline; fetch it, darling.'

As to woman's tact, I have always had my doubts about it, but in the way of duplicity towards one another they are peerless. By this admirable arrangement Mrs. Jennynge had secured her daughter's absence for full five minutes. The door had scarcely closed behind her ere Mr. Josceline took advantage of his long-sought opportunity.

'In Miss Anastasia's presence,' he said in his most dulcet tones, 'I could hardly ask you the question, my dear Mrs. Jennynge, which has been trembling on my lips.

Mrs. Jennynge murmured in an affrightcd tone, 'Dear me, what question?' and put on

the same expression, as nearly as she could recall it, which she had worn when her lost mate, or rather her penultimate, had demanded her virgin hand, more than a quarter of a century ago. And here it was that Mr. Josceline's experience failed him. He did not understand—what was the actual fact—that the widow was awaiting an offer of marriage there and then. He expected a little more delay and coquetry; and, though he meant to make his approaches very rapidly, it had not entered his mind to carry the widow's heart by a *coup de main*. One loses many things by over-refinement, though not often, as in this case, 5,000*l*. year.

'I was going to ask you,' he went on with gentle tenderness, 'whether the report of your departure from the *Ultramarine* had any foundation in fact. I heard it spoken of at the *table-d'hôte*, of course, but something within me bade me hope that there might be some mistake. The tidings seemed too sad—I had almost said too terrible—to be believed.'

'What can it signify to anybody, dear Mr. Josceline,' returned the widow, with tender

melancholy, 'whether a poor forlorn creature like myself goes away or stops?'

'I don't know as to *any*body,' replied Mr. Josceline; 'I can only answer for myself. To me your departure would be a misfortune indeed.'

'Do you really wish me to stay, then, a little longer? Really?' and the widow modestly lowered her eyes, and gave her hand a well-practised turn which exposed a bouquet of diamonds.

'I do. I implore it,' whispered Mr. Josceline eagerly.

'Then I remain,' she answered. 'Hush, here's Anastasia,' and she drew her fingers back from Mr. Josceline's tender grasp with such celerity that she actually left one of her rings in his hand. Even the temporary acquisition of such an article under such peculiar circumstances would have been a source of embarrassment to some people; but Mr. Josceline merely slipped it into his waistcoat pocket with one hand, while he took the Como from Anastasia with the other.

'This is indeed a masterpiece,' he said, and then fell into an art-ecstasy; a performance which to him was as easy as stroking a cat.

'And am I really to keep it?' he inquired, as he rose to take his departure.

'By all means,' said Anastasia delightedly; 'let me put it up in paper for you.'

In the rustle which this proceeding occasioned, the widow contrived to whisper, 'And you will keep *my* little gift too,' in Mr. Josceline's ear.

'I have given a ring or two away in my time,' reflected that gentleman when he found himself in his own apartment, 'and in each case with a certain significance attaching to it. But I don't remember any one having given *me* an "engaged ring" before; and it's not leap year, neither. However, the lady's booked, which is a great relief—my poor dear Ella.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CHANGE OF VIEWS.

On the evening of the same day on which Mr. Josceline and his daughter had visited Clover Cottage, Mrs. Gammer brought her two lodgers the tidings of little Davey's illness. The young men were greatly distressed by it, for the child was a favourite with them both; and Felspar at once went up to the hotel to volunteer his services as sick nurse, which Vernon would also have done but that the state of his wounded hand for the present rendered him useless for such a post. Felspar's assistance was of course declined, since the two ladies were already installed as nurses; and, as Mrs. Armytage cynically observed, 'It would hardly have done to turn the Prior's House into an Agapemone.' From inquiries made at the doctor's, it seemed that nothing was known for certain as to the

nature of the illness ; but among the little world of Wallington Bay it was represented, of course, as most alarming. Though some well-meaning attempts have been made of late years to discourage 'sensation,' they have not been wholly successful; and I am inclined to think that there is something in human nature itself which welcomes the thing, and has always done so, though of old it may have gone under some other name. With those who live dull, uneventful lives, in particular, anything out of the common way is attractive, even if it be a misfortune, provided only, of course, that it has not happened to themselves.

In Felspar's absence, Mrs. Gammer discoursed to his friend upon the topic with much satisfaction, and dwelt with unction upon the very gloomiest view of the case. 'After all, Mr. Walter, we must all die, young or old ; it don't much matter, for it is only a question of a year or two.'

'My dear Mrs. Gammer,' said Vernon, 'you speak like a philosophical work, but even philosophy may be overdone. It would make

me very uncomfortable, for example, to think you yourself would only live a year or two, and little Davey is much younger than you.'

'That's true, Mr. Vernon; and though, thank Heaven, I never have an ache or a pain, I don't feel so much of a permanency as I did.'

The term permanency in her mouth was characteristic; her calling coloured her whole existence; man, in her eyes, seemed not so much a tenant for life as a lodger, more or less liable to quit at a moment's notice.

'But these little people are soon up, as well as soon down,' urged Vernon cheerfully.

'Ah, but, mind you, the poor child is delicate, and a very bad subject for a disease of any kind. Fever, they say, comes from drains, as is like enough; for my part I don't hold with these new-fangled inventions—sanitaries and what not; and there have been no drains in Wallington to my knowledge, and, until this present one, no fevers either. Now in Lawton —for I ha' been there scores o' times and smelt it—they've got what they call a sewage system, and the consequence is mumps is never out of

the place. What I was going to say is, that fevers and drains is very much alike; you never know, as any landlady will tell you, if once you begin them, when you come to the end of drains; and it's the same with fevers, we can hardly expect that the mischief will stop with poor little Davey. There's poor Miss Josceline——'

'There's nothing the matter with Miss Josceline, surely?' interrupted Vernon, taking his pipe from his mouth (a sure sign with him of great perturbation of mind).

'Not yet; but she's volunteered to nurse the child, and is shut up with him and the nurse, and Mrs. Wallace, and Mr. Aird; they are all together, they tell me, in the Prior's House, in a galantine; so I reckon they must be keeping pretty close.'

'In quarantine, you mean, Mrs. Gammer Well, of course, it's right to cut them off from the rest of the people in the hotel; but, dear me, though it is just like her kind heart, how very rash of Miss Josceline to volunteer for such a duty.'

'Well, I don't know as to that, Mr. Vernon; it is just as rash of Mr. Felspar, and I must say a little selfish too, for if he was took with the fever, there's a lodger gone from Clover Cottage. After all, it's woman's work, is nussing, and I should think Miss Josceline would be the very one for it.'

'Why?'

'Well, she's gentle in her ways, and cheerful, and she won't go trapesing and trailing along the floors, as Miss Jennynge do, with that precious train of hers; why, that young woman couldn't stoop over a pillow, to give a drop of medicine to a body, or what not, for fear of busting her stays. Then there's Mrs. Armytage—she'd be no sort of use in a sick-room, I reckon; to have a will of your own is one thing, but she's too masterful; she'd take her own way with the patient (if she took him in hand at all, which I doubt), in spite of what the doctor might say; but Miss Josceline, she's of another sort, tractable, and gentle, and yet with plenty of sense. One can see that with half an eye.'

'Mrs. Gammer,' said Vernon, 'you were saying the other day you would like a set of the "Mayfair Keepsake" for your parlour book-shelf; how would you like it bound?'

'Lor, sir, I never said it serious, but only because you seemed to take to it so much yourself; and on wet days, when they've got no books, lodgers is so trying. "If Mr. Vernon likes it, being such a judge," says I, "it must be first-class reading; and then there are the pictures."'

'The "Keepsake" has some excellent things in it, no doubt,' returned Vernon. 'You shall have a copy of it next week, Mrs. Gammer, because—because you're a good woman.'

'You're very kind, I'm sure, to say so, Mr. Walter,' said the landlady, the usual peony tint of her complexion assuming the hue of beetroot. 'It's a comfort I'm sure, in this world, when one finds one's efforts to do one's duty appreciated, and more especially by one's lodger.'

Vernon, however, did not hear her; he was wrapped in thought: the question of blue and

gold, or green and gold, as a binding for the 'Keepsake,' was perhaps agitating his mind; so his companion believed, at all events, and, being a woman of much judgment in practical matters, she left him to his reflections.

Mr. Felspar had little to tell his friend with which we are unacquainted, and he found the task of breaking to him the fact of Ella's voluntary exposure to the danger of infection much easier than he had anticipated. Vernon remarked that to hear of such an act of self-sacrifice was only what he had expected, which, considering that he was already acquainted with the circumstances, was very true. The comparative coolness with which he received the news was so far satisfactory to his friend that it convinced him he had taken the right course in not communicating to Vernon what Mr. Josceline had told him respecting Ella's position and prospects. It would be time enough to do that should Vernon's intentions prove more serious. He could not, however, help contrasting the shock which the news of Miss Josceline's quixotic conduct had produced

upon himself, when Mrs. Trant had informed him of it, with the quiet manner in which Vernon had received it. It was the privilege of the young, who find women at their feet, he reflected bitterly, to be philosophic.

Yet all that night Vernon tossed sleeplessly in his bed, fevered, not with his wound, but with anxieties and forebodings founded on those careless words dropped by Mrs. Gammer, 'One can hardly expect that the mischief will stop with little Davey.' He pictured Ella, like some idealised Miss Nightingale, devoting herself to the case of her little patient till contagion struck her down, and health, and perhaps life itself, were sacrificed on the altar of devotion. As for Mr. Josceline permitting his daughter to undertake such a task, he could find no sort of explanation of it; unless he was so inordinately selfish that nothing awoke his fears that did not imperil his own personal safety, the man must be mad. Even Mr. Felspar, though he had so much more data to draw conclusions from, did not guess Mr. Josceline's real motive in thus acting; indeed he did not imagine that

he had any motive at all, but set down his conduct to sheer carelessness, and a dislike to contemplate serious possibilities.

Directly after breakfast the next morning, Mr. Felspar repaired to the hotel to make inquiries. He found things pretty much as they were. The little patient had passed an uneasy night; but no fresh symptoms had declared themselves. Of course none of the party in quarantine were visible, and, having obtained what information he could from Mrs. Trant, the painter was passing out on his road home when Mrs. Jennynge beckoned him in from her window. She was generally much at her ease with Felspar, whom, being poor, she naturally regarded as a person of no consequence, and also as being for the present, at least, in her employment; but on this occasion he noticed that she wore a look of some embarrassment, and that her tone was one of unwonted affability and conciliation. On repairing to her sitting-room he found Mrs. Jennynge alone, seated at her usual table by the window, where the manufactory of wax flowers was carried

on, and in the act of designing a blush rose. If he had recollected that, as a rule, she devoted her artistic talents to flowers of the fune real sort only, this fact would have been significant; but, as it was, it escaped his attention. He inquired after his pupil, Miss Anastasia, and was told she had gone out for a constitutional.

'The fact is,' added Mrs. Jennynge, with a nervous giggle, 'I was rather glad of it, since her absence gives me an opportunity of speaking to you a few words in private.'

'In private?' echoed Mr. Felspar, in an astonished tone.

The lady's colour was high, her voice timid if not tender, and her whole manner what the vulgar term flustered. Taking all this in connection with the manipulation of the blush rose, the painter was a little alarmed. He was not naturally more conceited than most of us—indeed he was less so; but it did strike him (with a shiver), for one passing instant, that Mrs. Jennynge had fallen in love with him, and was about to make him an offer of marriage.

'Yes, on business,' she continued, 'if tha

can be called such which has been a labour of love with you, as you have told us all your work is.'

'Oh, I see, the portrait,' interposed Felspar. It was impolite of him to interrupt her, but the sense of relief he experienced had been considerable, and the observation escaped him involuntarily.

'Yes, the portrait of my late husband.' (He noticed that she did not say as usual, when referring to that departed saint, 'my lost Nathaniel.') 'It is unpleasant to have to say so, Mr. Felspar, but the likeness does not give me satisfaction.'

'Indeed! Of course these things are a matter of opinion, Mrs. Jennynge,' replied the painter quietly, 'but certainly not a week ago you expressed your entire approval of it.'

'Did I? Then I think that must have been merely to spare your feelings.'

Mr. Felspar smiled an amused smile, which spoke a volume: it seemed to say, 'From what I know of your character, madam, that seems to me in the highest degree improbable.'

She knew what the smile meant well enough, for the flush of embarrassment gave way at once to the deeper flush of anger.

'Well, at all events I don't like it now,' said she bluntly.

'What's the matter with it?' inquired Mr. Felspar coolly, drawing back the curtain that concealed the picture standing on its easel. It struck him that some accident had happened to it, which might have induced a lady with a keen eye for her own advantage, such as he knew Mrs. Jennynge to be, to wish to cancel or amend her agreement. But there it stood as he had left it, not, perhaps, so idealised a presentment of her 'lost Nathaniel' as the widow might have desired, but undoubtedly a good likeness so far as it went, and it was almost finished.

'It is neither this nor that which is the matter,' said Mrs. Jennynge, regarding the portrait with marked disfavour; 'it does not suggest to me the late Mr. Jennynge at all.' Then, as if conscious that she had not expressed his relationship to her very pathetically, she

added, in a tone broken by emotion, "I miss the smile; I miss the voice.'

'The smile, madam,' said Felspar coldly, 'I can, if you please, make more pronounced, though it does not appear in the original; but as to the voice, that is certainly beyond me. A painter seldom succeeds in delineating the speech.'

The contemptuousness of his tone was extreme, and his companion felt it. It did not shame her, but it convinced her that she had started on the wrong tack; she had been wrong in supposing that the artist could be bullied.

'My dear Mr. Felspar,' she said, 'do not let us dispute upon this matter, which after all, as you have said, is one of mere opinion. You are satisfied, it seems, but I am not. Our arrangement was, I think, that I was to pay you a hundred pounds—fifty pounds on the completion of the sketch, which sum you have already received, and fifty pounds on the completion of the oil painting.'

'Which will be finished in three or four days at most,' observed Mr. Felspar quietly.

'I don't know about that, I'm sure, but I don't want it finished at all.

'Oh, I see. I have heard something of your intention to leave Wallington Bay, but instead of telling me of it in a straightforward manner, and asking to be off your bargain, you wish to find an excuse for dissatisfaction with my work.'

The speech was certainly far from conciliatory, but there was one thing in it which mitigated its severity to the person addressed. Mrs. Jennynge was relieved to find that Mr. Felspar attributed her change of views to her proposed departure from the hotel—an intention which, as we know, she had abandoned.

'Well,' said she naïvely, and without an attempt to resent his imputation, 'it seems hard to pay for a thing we don't want, doesn't it?'

'I might retort, madam,' answered Felspar, his words falling slowly and coldly, like the droppings from an icicle, 'that it seems also hard to have had to do work for nothing. But I am not in the habit of bargaining about my pictures. The law would award me the full

amount agreed upon, since I am ready to fulfil my part of our contract; but I am content to waive my rights.'

'And to charge me nothing?' exclaimed Mrs. Jennynge, in a tone less of gratitude than of expectancy.

'Nothing.'

'Now I call that handsome,' said Mrs. Jennynge admiringly; 'very handsome. I have often heard of the generosity of Art, and so on, but I never believed it. Mr. Felspar, you are a gentleman.'

Mr. Felspar looked at her with an inquiring glance, as though he would have said, 'How should *you* know?' but the implied sarcasm flew over her head; she only felt that she had made an excellent bargain.

'I am sure, my dear sir,' she continued effusively, 'we part the best of friends. Any further lessons, by-the-by, you may be good enough to give my daughter must be no longer given *as* a friend. I must insist upon your being remunerated for them.'

'But I thought you were going away?' said Mr. Felspar.

'To be sure, I forgot that,' said Mrs. Jennynge, for the first time looking really abashed. 'Our departure, however, is not quite certain.'

Mr. Felspar, to intimate that there were no doubts on that point in his own case, took up his hat. He was about to leave her, with a distant bow, when she stopped him.

'I again repeat you have behaved most nobly, Mr. Felspar; but about the cheque?'

'What cheque?'

'Well, the fifty pounds. I mean, of course, the first fifty. You will send it back to me, I conclude, in the course of the day. We *may* be leaving the hotel, and at all events, as my poor husband used to say, "short settlements make long friends."'

'I wish your husband was alive, madam, and acting towards me as you have done. Then I could tell him what I thought of his behaviour. As you are a lady that is unfortunately impossible.'

'Do you mean to say you are going to keep that first fifty, after all?'

'Most decidedly I am. If I was as rich as you, and you were as poor as I, I should doubtless return it to you as a free gift, but, as it is, I should as soon think of making over to you my last year's income. Good morning, madam.'

'I don't think much of artists,' murmured Mrs. Jennynge when he had left the room. 'However, I have got half the money back, which was more than was to be expected.' Then she took the picture off the easel and placed it on the floor with its back to the wall. The model of her lost Nathaniel after death had been already stowed away out of sight, and now she collected his photographs and put them without much ceremony into the table-drawer. Having thus cleared the apartment of all the touching mementoes of the departed, she returned with a sigh of relief to the construction of the blush rose which she intended for the Hon. George Emilius Josceline.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN QUARANTINE.

THE sharp contrasts of which the world is full are sharpest, not between rich and poor, I think (though, Heaven knows, those are clearly defined enough), but between the hale and the sick. It is true that riches may be the lot of the healthy, and sickness that of the poor, in which case the question of compensation becomes (to the unphilosophic mind) importunate indeed; but there is no need for our present purpose to come face to face with that. There was difference enough between the mode of life pursued by the tenants of the *Ultramarine* in general, and that of that portion of them cut off from the rest by the double doors which divided it from the Prior's House or Hostel. In the one case there was Mr. Josceline wooing and winning; Mrs. Jennynge, in an Indian

summer of rapture; and Miss Anastasia, beginning to suspect what was going on, and something more than disgusted at somebody's conduct—which, however, was a mystery to her. Mr. Josceline's arrival with four horses had effected even more than he had given them credit for; they had put it beyond all question that he had the means suitable to his birth, and 'What on earth he could see in her mamma?' was the inquiry Miss Jennynge was for ever naturally putting to herself. She was not absolutely jealous of her mother, for though she would have had no objection to become the Hon. Mrs. Josceline herself, her affections were not involved in the matter; but she said to herself privately that 'there was no fool like an old fool,' and that Mr. Josceline must be mad.' Otherwise, being a judicious young woman in most matters relating to her own interest, she made no fuss about it, and even pretended not to see what was going on. Mrs. Jennynge had told the simple truth when she said that her daughter was absolutely dependent on her; and therefore it behoved Anastasia to keep her

suspicions to herself, though as time went on they became amply corroborated. The absence of her late papa's photograph from the parlour wall, and the disappearance of the cast of his countenance, had been significant enough; but now she noticed a certain ring upon Mr. Josceline's finger about which there could be no question, except how in the world her mother, being much afflicted with rheumatism in the joints, could ever have slipped it over her knuckles. Also, though secrets are said to lie under the rose, there was a blush rose in wax in Mr. Josceline's sitting-room, which, so far from concealing anything from Miss Anastasia, told her everything.

Mrs. Armytage, however, knew nothing of what was taking place; but since, for Mrs. Jennynge's sake, Mr. Josceline had once or twice taken up the cudgels against her, the Professor's wife had grown bitter against him, and even described his 'goings on' as disgraceful. Indeed, partly to conceal his profounder designs, but also because flirtation was natural to him, Mr. Josceline did, in his daughter's

absence, make himself exceedingly agreeable, not only to Anastasia, who only pretended to like it, but to Mrs. Percival Lott, who liked it very much.

In the Prior's Hostel, if there was no flirtation, there was a great deal of reciprocal affection of another kind. Mr. Aird, when not at his post by little Davey's pillow, could never sufficiently exhibit, though more by his manner than his words, his sense of the generous kindness of the two ladies who, at such inconvenience, and even peril, to themselves, had undertaken to nurse his beloved child; and the two women loved one another, and the little patient clung to both of them (though always most to Ella), and drew their hearts more and more closely to him every day. The fever had not abated, though, as Dr. Cooper remarked of it, it ought to have done so; the more dangerous symptoms had disappeared, but the child's rest was broken and uneasy, and he awoke from his slumbers unrefreshed. The immediate cause of this was nightmare. In the middle of the night, he would wake up shrieking and

pointing to the foot of his bed, where, as he said, stood a spectre. This ridiculous idea, was, of course, combated by all about him, but without effect, and the incident had occurred twice. The ayah had always slept in his room. On the first night Ella had remained with him till nearly midnight, when she had been relieved at her post by Mrs. Wallace, and on the second the latter lady had remained till the attack, if such it could be called, took place. She protested with much energy that she had never closed an eye, but Davey had whispered to Ella that both his nurse and Mrs. Wallace were asleep, and had been awakened by his crying out, but too late to see the 'dark man.' Upon the personal appearance of this gentleman, so vaguely described, it was thought best not to question him, but they all agreed that it was either some reminiscence of the mild Hindoo that haunted the child's dreams, or some fancied metamorphosis of Abra herself. Neither of the two ladies was in the least given to superstition, and though, as it afterwards turned out, Mr. Aird himself had a very pronounced taste for

the horrible, he had never developed it in their presence. Ella suggested that the little patient should change his room, whereat Dr. Cooper only shrugged his shoulders: 'That could be done, of course,' he meant to imply, 'but the dark man was no more to be evaded by that means than the black care which sits behind the horseman is to be shaken off by a change of steed.

'Well, it is my watch to-night,' said Ella, 'and we will try it once more.' And she used the word 'watch' with a meaning; for she was secretly resolved not to go to sleep at all.

Her proper place was in that too comfortable arm-chair in which (as Ella shrewdly suspected) Mrs. Wallace had succumbed to the seductions of Morpheus; but no sooner were the three settled for the night, and Abra, as usual, had fallen fast asleep, than the child besought Ella to lie down beside him—'Then I shall not fear,' he said, 'even if the dark man comes again.'

He had made this request once before, when she had been keeping a shorter watch by his bedside; but she had persuaded him not to

press it. Dr. Cooper had told her that to sleep with the child would be to 'fly in the face of Providence'; for, if any mischief was really brewing, she would in that case be certain to suffer from it. But on this occasion the little fellow's appeal was so urgent, and his apprehensions so obvious, that she consented. Though she had never been troubled in that way herself, she had known imaginative girls at school to suffer much from nervousness at night, and her tender heart at once melted within her; and when, as soon as little Davey's arms were round her neck and his fears at rest, he sank into a tranquil slumber, she felt that she had already had her reward.

As she lay very quiet, for fear of disturbing him, her thoughts wandered over her past life, and, as usual, reverted to the mother whom she had never known, and had been tacitly forbidden to speak of. Had she herself, she wondered, when a little child, much younger than Davey, ever lain in loving arms, and been rocked to sleep on a mother's bosom? A dim recollection of a house with a porched door, that

looked out upon flowers and shrubs, was all that remained to her of her first home. While still of very tender years she had been transferred to Miss Steele's care, at Minerva House, where no reference to her past had ever been made. The girls, indeed—several batches of whom had come and gone in her time—had occasionally asked her questions upon that point; but, as it was manifest that she could not gratify their curiosity, the subject was soon dropped. When Davey got well she made up her mind on the first opportunity to endeavour to learn from her father what he could tell her of her own childhood; that was how she put it even to herself. There was something in his studied reticence concerning his wife that forbade her to seek for information more directly. If even he would speak of his own past, she would not feel herself so utterly bereft of all ties of association. It was the absence of these, perhaps, that caused her mind to revert with interest to recent events, and made her exaggerate the claims of mere acquaintanceship. But presently she fell to thinking of Mr. Felspar, who had

been so kind to her in regard to her drawing; and then upon Mr. Vernon. Perhaps it was their common affection to her present little companion that induced it; but her thoughts, having arrived at the young poet, dwelt there. What a pleasant face he had, and what a natural and charming manner! How Mr. Aird seemed to like him, and how devoted his friend Felspar was to him! Even his landlady, Mrs. Gammer, had spoken of him, when they called at the cottage, with affectionate enthusiasm. It must be a warm and honest heart that thus attracted every one towards it. Her father, though such a favourite with society, seemed to excite admiration rather than affection in his fellow-creatures, which was no doubt to be accounted for by that very reserve which restricted the demonstration of her own love for him; but Mr. Vernon had the faculty of evoking personal regard. It was fortunate; for, as it happened, he was as destitute of family ties as herself. Open as the day, he had made no secret of the fact that he was alone in the world, and had to win his own way in it. It was but natural that the similarity of their positions in

this respect should invest him, in her eyes, with an additional interest. She pictured him, to herself, growing in fame, and worthy of the reputation he was acquiring. Then her thoughts strayed to her own little picture; and would it, or would it not, she wondered, be thought worthy of the honours of print? and, if it should have that good fortune, how pleasant it would be for it to appear side by side with Mr. Vernon's poem! and what a charming souvenir it would form of her visit to Wallington Bay, and of the kind friends she had found there! When she met Mr. Vernon, in after years, he might be a great man; but she was sure he would not have forgotten her, because of that incident of the illustration, and——

'Ella! Ella!' whispered Davey, in hushed and frightened tones, 'there he is!'

'There *who* is, my darling?' she answered tenderly. 'You are dreaming.'

'No, no! I saw him quite plainly!' insisted the child, with beating heart. 'If I dared to look up I should see him again, in his cloak, at the foot of the bed.'

Ella strained her eyes in the direction indicated. There was a night-lamp in the room, which gave a tolerable light, but insufficient to make things distinct. 'Abra! Abra!' she cried.

With a grunt and a snort the Asiatic awoke. 'What is it, Missee Ella?'

'Light the candles. You see, my dear Davey, there is nothing here.'

'I saw him!' answered the child, his large eyes roving apprehensively over the room. 'He stood there—just there—in his long cloak. Papa says it's like a girl to be frightened; but I can't help it.'

'Of course you can't; nobody is frightened who can help it. You shall change your room to-morrow, Davey, I promise you that; and we will keep the candle alight for the rest of the night. Now you will go to sleep again, like a good boy.'

''Es I will, dear Ella.'

She folded him in her arms, and in a few minutes slumber once more overtook him; but Ella remained awake. It might have been

fancy—indeed it was folly to suppose otherwise —yet she thought she had seen a vague something at the bed-foot when the child had first cried out. What it was she could not describe; but something with some dim resemblance to a human figure had grown shadowy and disappeared under her gaze. It gave her, she knew not how, the impression of having been more distinct before her attention was called to it. Such delusions have happened to many of us, and, most commonly, when the mind has been disturbed and thrown out of gear by unwonted circumstances. In an ancient portion of an ancestral mansion, cut off from wholesome life, it was not unlikely that an imaginative young girl should have thus partaken of the fevered fancies of her patient. That this would be the view of others, at least, Ella had the good sense to perceive; and what weighed with her much more was the conviction that the revelation of what she had seen, or thought she had seen, would only increase existing troubles. She therefore said nothing about it to her companions, nor did she mention it in

the daily letter which she wrote to her father describing, always with gaiety, how life went on in the Prior's Hostel; only, for the future, she took care that Davey's apartment should be occupied by Mr. Aird (whom she justly deemed to be ghost-proof), and *vice versâ*.

It was curious, however, in spite of her prudent resolutions, how this strange incident affected not so much her spirits as her tone of thought, and, from unconscious sympathy, that of her companions. With the little patient, of course, they were always cheerful; but when alone, and not conversing about him, the topics of their talk became more serious, if not more sombre. Something was owing, no doubt, to the tightening bond of friendship, the tendency of which, among its other blessings, is to withdraw us from the commonplace, and to substitute for the froth of the wave the wave itself. When familiarity reaches a certain point we begin to trot out our hobbies, which may, or may not, be attractive animals. Mr. Aird's was a hearse horse. He had a theory on suicide; he thought that a man had a right to dispose

of his own life, if in so doing it did not affect others injuriously. This was vehemently combated by Mrs. Wallace (whose views were mildly Evangelical) upon religious grounds.

'There's nothing against it in the Scriptures,' persisted Mr. Aird. 'What does Miss Josceline say?'

'I don't think a soldier should leave his post before the battle is over,' was the grave reply.

'Ah, that's the military view; but then you see, I am a civilian,' answered Mr. Aird grimly. 'Besides, I am supposing that he has no one to defend but himself.'

Then he began to furnish instances from his own personal experience. One, in particular, of a husband he knew, who, having lost his only child, wrote in the fly-leaf of his Bible to his dead wife, 'There is nobody left now; I have seen all I love leave the earth before me, and I come to you to-night.' They were very interesting stories; but a trifle too much so for his audience, and especially under existing circumstances.

'My dear Mr. Aird, you make our flesh creep!' remonstrated Mrs. Wallace; whereupon he desisted.

Finding the enemy reduced to silence, it was only natural that the lady should fire a last shot. 'You argue,' said Mrs. Wallace, 'that, in the case of wicked people, the very best thing they can do is "to take themselves off," as you call it, since, in so doing, they do the world a service; but how can you tell that if they lived on they would continue to be wicked?'

'Because it is in accordance with experience,' said Mr. Aird. 'Don't you feel growing worse and worse yourself?'

But Mrs. Wallace was not to be put off by jest. There is a secret drawer in most people's minds in which they keep their serious convictions; Mr. Aird had touched it in her case, and out they came. 'You have told us some strange experiences of your own life,' she said; 'let me tell you one of mine. Years ago, when I was a little child, my father went to Exeter for a couple of days, on business, leaving no one in

the farmhouse but my aunt Esther, and myself, and some female servants. As our house was in a lonely part of the country, and since burglaries had been recently committed in the neighbourhood, he had proposed, before he went, to leave us some male protector; but my aunt had declined it. She always reminded me of what I have read of Cromwell's troops, being of great courage, and a piety such as I have never seen equalled; only she had no harshness nor uncharitableness to others. She slept alone, in the next room to me, where, for safety's sake, in my father's absence, what little plate we had was kept in an oak chest. When she went to bed at night it was her custom (for I could hear her voice, and if I listened intently, which I was sometimes tempted to do, her very words) to pray aloud, not only for ourselves, but her fellow-creatures. It was not her way to hope that a handful of human beings only, with herself and friends among them, should be saved, but the whole world, including even the wicked. She was a simple-hearted woman, in whom whatever chanced to come to her ears

out of the common made a great impression, and on this occasion what my father had said about the late robberies committed by tramps in the district recurred to her mind. It was 'borne in upon her,' as she afterwards expressed it, to beseech the Divine compassion in favour of the houseless wretches constrained, perhaps by want as much as evil habit, to break through and steal. I heard her; and then, to my astonishment and alarm, I heard a faint cry of alarm, and then two voices. They spoke together for some time, and then I heard two persons leave the room; and, after a long interval (during which I lay in a state of great trepidation), my aunt returned, and said softly, through the door, 'Are you asleep, Cicely?' and I answered, 'No,' and she came in and told me what had happened.

'When she had risen from her knees, and was about to take off her dressing-gown, her eyes fell upon the valance of the bed, from beneath which looked out two other eyes, and on meeting her gaze the person who owned them dragged himself out. He was a man (as she

described him) terrible to look upon, of herculean frame, and bloated face, travel-stained and in rags, with a pair of iron-tipped shoes in his hands, which he had taken off in order to reach his late hiding-place without noise; but his voice and manner were in strange contrast to these things.

'"I came here to-night, lady, to rob your house," he said. "I have been lying beneath your bed for hours, rehearsing as to how it should be done, and resolved, if I met any resistance, to do worse than rob, for I am one that sticks at nothing. Then, all of a sudden, as I lay cursing your late hours, I heard you come in and read your Bible, all alone—a thing I have never done myself, except in my prison cell, when I felt pretty sure that the chaplain's eye was at the keyhole.

'"'Well, this is a pious old party,' I says to myself, 'but I hopes she won't be long.' But when from your Bible you went to prayer, and after praying to God Almighty for your little niece, and this, that, and the other, you came, quite naturally like, to them as never say a

word to Him for themselves, and amongst them even for downright bad ones, like me, then says I, 'May I be damned if I takes a penny piece from her, or hurts a hair of her grey head.'" Then replied my aunt in her quiet gentle fashion, "But why, unhappy man, need you be damned at all?"

'It had never struck the poor fellow, I suppose, that there had been any alternative for him, until she went on to explain it, but it is as true as I am sitting here that within five minutes this man was upon his knees repeating a prayer after her, just as a child might do at his mother's bidding. She afterwards took him downstairs and gave him some supper, of which he stood in great need, but of the money which my aunt pressed upon him he only took a very little, in order, as he said, to keep him from present temptation and set him on an honest road. My aunt made me promise to say nothing of what she told me lest the poor fellow should suffer for it, and we never heard of his getting into trouble again.'

'That is a very curious story, no doubt,' said Mr. Aird. 'I won't be so ill-mannered as

to say, as many people would, that it is possible your aunt caught sight of the man before she said her prayers, and framed them to suit his case; but I don't see how the narrative bears upon your argument that wicked people may be turned into good people. Though the man did not rob your aunt, he may have gone on robbing other people.'

'Let me finish my story,' said Mrs. Wallace, quietly. 'Years afterwards, when my aunt, then near her end, was staying at Plymouth for the sake of the sea air, and I was with her, one Sunday morning "a very moving preacher" was advertised to hold forth in a certain chapel; and though the attraction, I confess, was greater to my aunt than to myself, I volunteered to accompany her. The preacher was a large ungainly man, looking more like a prize-fighter than a minister of the gospel; but his words had an impassioned earnestness which I have rarely heard, and which carried the congregation with them. We were too great a distance from him to see his features, but his voice reached every part of the crowded place.

His theme was on the saving powers of grace, and in order to show that no man could be so fallen but that he might be raised up again, he evidenced an extreme case within his own experience. "I knew a man once," he said, "who was a greater sinner than any here. He owned no Father in Heaven, no brother on Earth; his trade was robbery; by day he was a thief, and by night a house-breaker."'

'"Oh, Aunt," whispered I, "did you hear that?"

'"Yes, my dear," she answered softly; "that is the very man himself: I knew him directly I heard his voice."

'Then he went on, point by point, to describe what had happened on that eventful night at our home, and how that from the hour at which he had heard my aunt at her prayers he had become a new and honest man; which (to cut a long story short) we afterwards found on inquiry to be the case. He had a shoemaker's shop in the town, where for years he had been much respected. So you see, Mr. Aird, that wicked people need not always put

an end to themselves in despair of becoming good.'

'Unfortunately, my dear madam, they very seldom do,' returned the old Indian drily; 'my experience is that they remain to plague the good people as much as possible. But I am glad to find that your felonious friend had some other trade than sensational preaching, which is, in my opinion, no very great improvement upon burglary with violence.'

It was thus that the little party in the Prior's Hostel conversed together, on a footing more confidential and familiar than would have been possible had they been at large in the world without; and though there was no uniformity (and even, as we have seen, considerable disagreement) among them as to opinion, they were becoming close friends.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A CHANGE OF PATIENTS.

We have been told by the lips of the wise that if we poor mortals knew what was going to happen to us—whether of good or ill—we should not find it an improvement; the nervous and despondent would, it is true, no longer make themselves miserable with imaginary sorrows, but the real ones would throw such a gigantic shadow before them as would make such men's condition even worse; while, on the other hand, the sanguine would be robbed of their hopes. The argument, no doubt, is a sound one, but nevertheless the unexpectedness of human life is one of its terrors. In the clearest sky, when all is sunshine, the clouds will hurry up from the most unlooked-for quarters, and the thunder-bolt of misfortune falls; and again, when the clouds, as it would seem, have done their worst,

and all has been so dark so long that some gleam of sunshine seems inevitable, the thunderbolt still falls. It is like luck at cards, which defies the doctrine of chances and puts the theory of probabilities to shame; and on the whole, or so it seems to us ungrateful mortals, it is such bad luck.

Little Davey's illness was blowing over, the fever was abating, and, what was better, losing its more dangerous features, so that Dr. Cooper was in two minds as to letting the party in the Prior's Hostel out of quarantine, when a pleasant surprise happened to two of them. The three were at breakfast together as usual (for the Doctor had made a point of their not taking their meals in the sick room), when two little parcels came by post, one containing the prettiest gold watch and chain for Mrs. Wallace, and the other a sparkling locket for Miss Josceline.

'Goodness gracious!' cried the former simply, 'this can surely never be for me; there must be some mistake.'

But Ella, though greatly surprised, had no doubt as to who had sent the presents, for her

locket was the facsimile in shape of the one she had picked up in Abbot's Creek. Of the value of its coat of diamonds she was wholly ignorant; but she at once understood that the intention of the donor was to express his twofold gratitude to her, first for the recovery of his wife's portrait, and secondly for her attendance on his child.

'Oh, Mr. Aird!' she cried with a grateful blush, 'you are too kind. I have never seen anything so beautiful.'

'I'm glad you like it, my dear young lady,' replied the old gentleman, going on with his egg; 'you must wear it for Davey's sake and mine. The same remark applies to your watch, Mrs. Wallace.'

'But it is so much too good for me,' remonstrated that lady in a rapture.

'I am sorry to contradict you for about the hundredth time since we've been shut up together,' observed Mr. Aird drily; 'but nothing is too good for either of you.'

'Oh, I wish I could get out to show it my husband,' exclaimed Mrs. Wallace.

'And I to show my locket to papa,' cried Ella.

'From what Cooper said yesterday,' observed Mr. Aird, 'I think our prison doors will be opened to-morrow. By-the-by, what's that under the door?'

The morning letters now arrived in that fashion as all other correspondence from without; but this was not like an ordinary letter. It was much larger, though very thin, and it was directed to Miss Josceline.

'No more lockets, surely?' exclaimed Mrs. Wallace, laughing.

It was not; but it was something that gave Ella even a greater pleasure than the locket had given her. It was a proof of her illustration to Vernon's poem of the 'Italian Boy,' and of course gave indisputable evidence that the picture had been accepted by the 'Mayfair Keepsake.'

To all young people—and for that matter to old ones also—there are few joys to be compared with that of seeing their own effusions for the first time in print; and as with the writer

so with the artist, and (what is curious) especially with the indifferent artist. A poem looks ever so much better of course in print than in MS., but it is not to be compared with the improvement that takes place in a picture indifferently executed, which has been through the hands of the wood engraver. The skilled draughtsman complains, and often with justice, that his work suffers grievously from subsequent manipulation after it has left his hands; but with the novice the reverse is the case. A good engraver will supply defects, if he does not absolutely improve upon the original. At all events, whether from that cause, or from the modest opinion of her own performance, Ella thought much more highly of her 'Italian Boy' in his new shape than in his old one. To her, moreover, it meant a great deal more than the mere gratification of a pardonable vanity; it gave her material hope; it was, or so it seemed to her, the first round of the ladder which might lead her in after-years, not to competence indeed (for her views were very humble), but to self-support. If such things were worth

printing, she supposed that they must needs be worth paying for—however small might be the honorarium, it would be something; and she felt that she could do a good many such drawings without much injury to her brain-tissue. Besides the picture, there had come the poem it illustrated, which she read with great approbation, and with such interest and attention that when she had read it a second time she found she had got it by heart. It was because she admired it so—and much more, however incredible it may seem, than her own illustration—that she could not help showing them both to Mrs. Wallace, who fell into raptures about the wrong one. She thought the picture 'so pretty,' and Ella a perfect miracle of intelligence for having drawn it: as to the poem, she frankly confessed herself no judge of such things, but had always heard Mr. Vernon was very clever. Directly she had spoken, Ella regretted having been so confidential; the word 'clever,' so far from being the right term to use, sounded somehow almost depreciating; and it also struck her that Mr. Vernon might

not relish her having exposed him to such criticism. Moreover, what was still worse, before she could restrain Mrs. Wallace's enthusiasm that lady had summoned Mr. Aird to 'come and look at Miss Josceline's beautiful drawing,' which covered the poor girl with confusion. It was one thing to have confided her secret to a motherly friend of her own sex, and quite another to share it with Mr. Aird.

'Poems are not much in my way,' said that gentleman with his usual frankness, 'but the picture is charming; I had no idea you were an artist, Miss Ella.'

'Nor I either,' replied she with an uncomfortable laugh; 'Mrs. Wallace ought not to have shown it to you.'

'There is nothing to be ashamed of, I am sure,' said Mr. Aird good-naturedly, but also with a certain gravity which did not escape her. 'Are you in the habit of illustrating Mr. Vernon's poems?'

'I have never done but this one. How could it be otherwise?' inquired Ella simply, but with a blush that would rise to her cheek *in spite* of all her efforts.

'To be sure; you've only known him a few days, have you?' was the quiet reply. 'The proof-sheet is damp, I see; he has lost no time in sending you what he knew would give you pleasure.'

'I don't know whether he sent it, or Mr. Felspar,' said Ella; 'they were both very kind about my little drawing—I mean about helping me to get it published.'

'It is Mr. Vernon's handwriting,' remarked Mr. Aird drily, 'so it is probable it was he who sent it.'

Then Mrs. Wallace burst out laughing.

'Why do you laugh?' inquired Ella, feeling almost angry with that excellent lady, though she could not have explained, even to herself, why she should be so.

'Mrs. Wallace laughs,' said Mr. Aird, 'because she thinks you had not much doubt in your own mind as to which of those young gentlemen sent the picture. But you see I am not so rude. I am as grave as a judge, which, indeed, I was at one time. But there is Dr. Cooper. Will he let us out of prison to-day or not, I wonder?'

Ella esteemed the good doctor greatly, but his arrival had never been so welcome to her as it was at that particular moment.

She was not one of those young ladies who rather like being rallied about a young gentleman's attentions to them than otherwise, but the question presented itself even to her (and added to her embarrassment), Would she have taken it to heart so much, if her heart had not been concerned in the matter?

It fortunately happened that she had at once something else to think of, for the Doctor's verdict was that the child was convalescent, and that all danger might now be considered over, whether as regarded himself or others, and in a few minutes Ella was clasped in her father's arms.

'You are not looking well, papa?' were her first anxious words.

'I am quite well, darling,' was his reply; 'though perhaps "none the better," as the schoolboys say, "for seeing you." Extreme joy, you know, has sometimes the same effect as sorrow. Now tell me how you have fared in your prison-house?'

There was not much to tell him that had not been already told in her daily bulletins, save what had occurred that very morning.

'Dear papa, I hope—indeed I am *sure* you will be pleased to hear that my little picture has been accepted by the magazine. And only see how much better it looks in print.'

'It does, my dear,' he answered quietly; 'but I have seen it already. Mr. Vernon was so good as to bring a duplicate of it for me when he brought yours.'

'Did he come himself, then? That was very kind of him,' said Ella impulsively: the next moment the recollection of Mrs. Wallace's badinage occurred to her, and she turned crimson.

'Yes,' said Mr. Josceline, keeping his eyes fixed on her face, which increased her confusion, 'he came in person, and we had some conversation together. He is an estimable young man for his station in life, no doubt, but seems to entertain peculiar opinions.'

'He is very well-meaning, I think,' said Ella, rather inappositely.

Mr. Vernon had been kind to her, and she felt bound to say what she could for him; and the tone in which her father had spoken of him had been sufficiently severe and curt.

'No doubt,' he replied; 'I don't wish to imply that his opinions are bad or vicious, but only that they are not the views entertained by persons of our class. They are what I suppose would be termed Bohemian, which it is only natural they should be. He is not quite the sort of man I should wish a son of mine—and still less a daughter—to be familiar with.'

'I am very sorry,' said Ella simply.

'Why should you be sorry, my dear? It is not likely that you and he will again be thrown together even so casually as has happened here. Your paths in life will necessarily be far apart. You must thank him, of course, though, from what he said to me, I gather that you are at least equally indebted in the matter to Mr. Felspar for the service he has done you—since you seem to consider it of some importance—and there will be an end of it.'

'Very well, papa.'

There was no despair in her tone, such as he almost feared there would be, but there was genuine disappointment. She would like to have drawn more pictures for the 'Keepsake,' and to have illustrated more poems of Mr. Vernon's. This partnership in art and letters had a certain inexplicable charm for her.

'What is that you have in your hand, my darling?' inquired Mr. Josceline, after a long and somewhat uncomfortable pause. 'The case looks promising, as if it came from a jeweller's shop.'

'Oh, the locket!' But a few minutes ago she had pictured to herself the pleasure with which she should show Mr. Aird's present to her father, but now all that seemed to have faded away; the matter had become almost indifferent to her.

'What locket? Dear me, who could have given you this?' He had opened the case, and was regarding the splendid gift with admiration. 'It must have been some very generous person.'

'It was, papa. Mr. Aird sent for it from

London by way of thanks, as I suppose, for my nursing little Davey, which I am sure I should have been glad to do at all events. It is altogether too rich a guerdon for so slight a service.'

'It is very handsome, certainly, my dear; but you must not underrate your own deserts. It is very natural that a man of generous nature, like Mr. Aird, should have endeavoured to show himself sensible of them.'

'But is it not very costly? I know nothing about such things, but if these are real diamonds——'

'Well, I don't think it's very likely, Ella,' put in Mr. Josceline, smiling, 'that Mr. Aird would have given you paste. If I am not mistaken, this did not cost less than eighty guineas.'

'Eighty guineas! Oh, papa! And he has given Mrs. Wallace a gold watch and chain.'

'Indeed! Well, doubtless to a man of Mr. Aird's fortune such things are but flea-bites; still it is very creditable to him. He must (as I always suspected) have a noble nature. May I look inside, my dear?'

'Inside the locket? Of course, papa. Why do you ask such a question?' inquired Ella, in unaffected surprise.

'Well, I didn't know,' he answered with a smile of significance. 'These little cadeaux are sometimes of a private nature. They sometimes contain a portrait of the donor, for example. However, this is empty, I see, at present.'

'Yes. By-the-by, Mr. Aird was so good as to promise, papa, that he would get me a photograph of little Davey to put in it; and then, as I said to him, the other side I shall devote to one of yourself.'

'I think you should not have said that, Ella,' said Mr. Josceline gravely; 'it was hardly gracious. You might have asked Mr. Aird for his own picture. However, it is very gratifying—very.' He drew his daughter towards him and kissed her tenderly.

'Why do you sigh, dear papa?' said Ella, alarmed by the expression of her father's face even more than by that evidence of emotion. 'I am sure you are not well.'

'Yes, darling; I am well enough, as well a

I ever shall be, that is, the least thing that excites me——' and Mr. Josceline fell back in his chair with a groan of pain.

Ella flew to the bell, and then to her father's side. 'Esther, tell Dr. Cooper to come to papa directly. He has not left the house, I think, but if he has, send for him *at once*.'

Ella was frightened, but she was not one of those whom alarm deprives of their presence of mind.

She loosened her father's neckerchief and wheeled his chair to the window.

In a few minutes, which seemed, however, an age to her, Dr. Cooper arrived.

'Oh, Doctor, what is the matter?' she whispered, after he had felt the now unconscious patient's pulse and made his investigations.

'My poor child, you must bear up,' said he evasively; 'it is very hard for you to have to be sick nurse so soon again.'

Then two of the hotel servants came in and carried her father up to his room, and he was put to bed. And Ella took her place by his pillow.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A FEMALE CHAMPION.

On the very morning that Mr. Josceline was taken ill, and while the inmates of the *Ultramarine* were for the most part unconscious of that event, a curious scene took place in the ladies' drawing-room. This apartment was intended for the use, not only of the fair sex, but of such gentlemen as had female belongings; but, thanks to the awe inspired by Mrs. Armytage, it was seldom intruded upon by males. That excellent lady was fond of reading yesterday's newspaper (at Wallington Bay it arrived the morning after publication) not only aloud, but in a fine sonorous voice which demanded attention; and, though women will endure considerable infliction of that kind, men will not. Poor Mr. Percival

Lott, having ventured one morning within these sacred precincts in search of his wife (which made her more suspected, by-the-by, of being a bride than ever), was seized by the glittering eye of Mrs. Armytage, and compelled to listen to three leading articles, with that lady's comments thereon, before he could make his escape. After which terrible experience the place was shunned of man.

On the occasion, therefore, to which we refer, only ladies were present: as it happened, all those with whom we have made acquaintance, except Mrs. Wallace, were of the party. There was no danger from the newspaper at present, for it was airing, as usual, by the kitchen fire, and every one was engaged with the correspondence which had arrived for them by the morning's post. Mrs. Armytage, who had always a perfect sheaf of letters, was selecting such passages from them as she deemed adapted for public reading, chiefly concerning the experiences of the Browns and Joneses of her acquaintance with their domestic servants; but 'Oh, indeed' or 'You don't say so' were

the only signs of interest she had succeeded in exciting; when suddenly she cried 'Oh, good gracious!' and every one looked up at her, as well they might, in wonder. Her face was red with excitement; her eyes were gleaming with fire; the hand that held the communication she had just opened fairly trembled with agitation.

'Oh, the villain!' she cried; 'the treacherous, hypocritical villain!'

One would really have thought that some one had been trifling with her mature affections, and that she had found him out.

'What is the matter?' inquired Mrs. Jennynge.

'Everything is the matter,' was the other's comprehensive reply. 'We have been imposed upon, tricked, made fools of; and of all the people in this world, by Mr. Josceline. He's an impostor.'

'Why, you don't mean to say that he is not an Honourable after all?' exclaimed Mrs. Percival Lott, who had certainly treated the gentleman in question with an affability (to say

the least of it) that she would not have accorded to any male unconnected with the aristocracy. She made a picture in her brain of a swindler of the first class, who among other goods obtained under false pretences, could boast of some fancy articles.

'He may be an Honourable by birth,' replied Mrs. Armytage, 'but his behaviour has been very much the reverse of it.'

Mrs. Percival Lott gave a sigh of relief. It was a comfort to find that whatever he had done he was still genuine.

'You don't mean to say that he is a married man?' inquired Mrs. Jennynge, in such a quavering voice that, had Mrs. Armytage had her senses about her as usual, she would have drawn her deductions from it at once; but her mind was too much occupied with the tremendous news she had in store, to pay attention to anything else.

'Married! He is far worse than married,' cried she. 'He is a disgraced clergyman; his living is sequestered' (a slight mistake of Mrs. Armytage's for 'sequestrated;' but what

matters a syllable or two in such a revelation?) 'he is a disgraced and abandoned man.'

'But what has he *done?*' inquired Miss Jennynge, who, unlike her mother, had borne the astounding intelligence with much fortitude, and was greedily desirous of details.

'Done? Well, something, I suppose, too dreadful to tell, since my informant does not go into it. The idea of his having given himself such airs and graces! For besides all this, the man hasn't a penny to bless himself with.'

'Oh dear, dear me,' murmured Mrs. Jennynge to herself, her castle in the air subsiding into a cottage at once, and not a cottage *ornée* either. 'I wonder whether he will return my ring?'

'His whole story, which I have from the most reliable of sources, is most discreditable,' continued Mrs. Armytage. 'His wife was a person of low extraction, and ran away from him. That must have been Miss Ella's mother, you know.'

'I confess I never quite took to that girl,'

observed Mrs. Percival Lott. 'There was something—what shall I call it?'

'Something of a bourgeois type about her, you would say,' suggested Miss Jennynge.

'Just so,' said Mrs. Armytage, for once showing a sign of adhesion to her young friend's opinion. 'Her instincts were low. I remember when there was some talk of a hateful common steamer touching at Wallington once a week, she absolutely rather advocated it than otherwise, upon the ground that poor people had a right to enjoy themselves.'

'That was two words for herself, it seems, and one for them,' observed Miss Jennynge, acidly, 'if what Mrs. Armytage tells us of Mr. Josceline's means is correct.

'It is quite correct, every word of it,' insisted Mrs. Armytage, 'though I cannot give up my informant's name.'

'But that's important, too,' observed Mrs. Jennynge, who, in this sudden wreck of her aspirations, was rather inclined to look out for spars.

'It is a lady of my own acquaintance, and

whose word may be believed as though it were my own,' observed Mrs. Armytage, tartly.

'Still, if the thing could be proved in any way—for instance, to begin with, that Mr. Josceline had been disgraced—it would be more satisfactory,' remarked Miss Jennynge, naïvely.

'I'll tell you how we'll do it,' exclaimed Mrs. Armytage, clapping her hands; 'we'll ask him to say grace at dinner to-night. Then we shall see how he takes it.'

'That's a capital idea,' cried Mrs. Percival Lott. 'What fun it will be—at least I mean, what an interesting moment when you put the question to him!'

'Oh, but *I* shan't put it,' said Mrs. Armytage, hastily. 'I think, considering the—the *very* friendly terms in which Mr. Josceline has been placed with Mrs. and Miss Jennynge—taking coffee in their rooms and what not—it is obviously their place—indeed, it seems to me they owe it in reparation to the rest of us for having encouraged him—to—in short, they must bell the cat.'

'What have I to do with the cat?'

inquired Mrs. Jennynge, wildly; 'I hate cats.'

'My dear madam, it is a well-known proverb,' explained Mrs. Armytage. 'What I mean is, that it is you who should ask Mr. Josceline to say grace this evening.'

'I wouldn't do it, if it was ever so,' exclaimed Mrs. Jennynge, who in this extremity had utterly discarded her French for the vernacular. 'You try it yourself, and see if he don't put you down pretty quick, or send you flying with a flea in your ear.'

'A flea in my ear!' echoed Mrs. Armytage, with contemptuous disgust.

'It's a well-known proverb,' retorted Mrs. Jennynge, in her turn. 'Oh yes, I should just like to see you at it.'

Though somewhat vulgarly expressed, this sentiment was entertained by the whole party. They thought Mrs. Armytage's plan a most excellent one, provided only that she executed it herself.

'Perhaps, after all, it should come from a gentleman rather than a lady,' observed Mrs.

Armytage; 'suppose you get your husband to do it, Mrs. Lott?'

'*My* husband! Certainly not,' returned the lady addressed. Why not *your* husband. The Professor would do it capitally.'

'The Professor is the very man,' said Mrs. Jennynge. She did not mean it sarcastically, but really looked forward to the incident as being a gratifying gratuitous exhibition: but this innocent expression of feeling gave great offence.

'Do you suppose, madam, that *my* husband, Professor Timothy Armytage, a man of European reputation, is going to mix himself up with an hotel scandal!'

'Hoity toity!' retorted Mrs. Percival Lott. 'And why not your husband as much as my husband?'

A question not to be answered: fortunately at this moment there was a diversion: Mrs. Wallace entered the room with a grave face.

'My dear Mrs. Wallace, I am so glad you are come,' exclaimed Mrs. Armytage, graciously. 'You are the very person we wish to see.

A matter of very serious importance to us all has just taken place—that is, we have just come to the knowledge of it—and your good husband is the very person to get us out of our difficulty.'

'The very man,' whispered Miss Jennynge to Mrs. Percival Lott. 'I heard him say, "What! no grace?" the first day he came to the *table-d'hôte*. He will now have an opportunity of supplying the omission.'

'I am sure my husband will be ready to do any one a kindness,' observed Mrs. Wallace, simply.

'And this *is* a kindness,' said Mrs. Armytage, decisively; 'certainly to us, and I may say even to Mr. Josceline himself, since it is to put a stop to his career of duplicity.'

'Duplicity! and Mr. Josceline! What do you mean?' interrupted Mrs. Wallace, speaking with great emotion. 'Pray say nothing against Mr. Josceline just now, madam, even if it is true, which I very much doubt. Don't you know what has happened?'

'No—what?' inquired Mrs. Armytage, as

greedy for more gossip as a tiger who has tasted blood for gore.

'What? what?' reiterated the other ladies.

'Well, Mr. Josceline has just been taken seriously ill; he has been carried upstairs and put to bed.'

'That's his art,' observed Mrs. Armytage, incredulously. 'He has had a hint that his duplicity has been discovered. To take to one's bed is a very old diplomatic device.'

'Mrs. Armytage,' returned Mrs. Wallace, with a severity that would have astonished herself had she been conscious of it; 'if what you have to say against Mr. Josceline is false, it is shameful; and if it is true, to say it now is shameful likewise. You are speaking of a dying man.'

'A dying man! How dreadful!' exclaimed Mrs. Jennynge, in quavering tones; 'you are always saying dreadful things, Mrs. Wallace.'

'I am only saying what Dr. Cooper has just told me, that Mr. Josceline's life must be counted by hours. There is no hope.'

'Still,' urged Mrs. Armytage, irritated at

being taken to task—and, as was evident, with the approval of the company—by a lady so inferior to her in the social scale, 'the truth must be told, we are taught, even of the dead.'

'If this man has imposed upon us, Mrs. Armytage,' interrupted Mrs. Wallace, in a terrible voice, '"this man," as you call him, is about to appear before his Maker. What matters it what may be your judgment of him or mine? Moreover, if you have no reverence for the dead, respect the living, and be silent. Remember, Mr. Josceline has a daughter.'

Mrs. Armytage opened her mouth twice to speak, but opened it in vain. She only gasped like a fish out of water; while Mrs. Wallace, keeping her eyes fixed upon her with withering scorn, moved slowly, nay (so bravely did her indignation bear her up) almost majestically, from the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DYING WORDS.

It is most common for the doctors to err (or to pretend to err) in the case of the sick on the side of hopefulness. They say, 'We have seen persons even worse, who have got over it: we are not prepared to say there is no hope' (indeed, when they are prepared to go to that length, matters are serious indeed); or, 'To-morrow we shall be able to speak with greater certainty,' when, in fact, they have private doubts whether the patient will not have 'another morn than ours.' But sometimes, misled by pulse and feature, and ignorant of the mental vitality of a man—the vigorous will that for a season will bid defiance to death itself—they fix the date of dissolution too early. Mrs. Wallace had but repeated Dr. Cooper's words when she said that Mr. Josce-

line's life was now to be measured by hours. But the hours were more than he had reckoned upon. They reached to days. What days they were to Ella, can only be imagined by those who have watched the parting from them of their only earthly tie. She had often thought of such a contingency, of course, though it was an idea she had always put from her, as though to dwell upon it had been to hasten the event; but it was so different, so far as the sufferer was concerned, from all she had ever pictured it to be. There was resignation, in its completeness almost sublime, but somehow with little that could be called divine about it; and there was patience. Once only, when she whispered in trembling tones, 'Dear papa, would you like to see a clergyman?' did he show symptoms of irritation. His reply was a simple 'No;' but uttered with a vehemence that astounded almost as much as it shocked her. There had not seemed to be life enough in him to have so expressed himself. For the most part he lay motionless, with her hand in his, looking at her with silent pity.

'I ought to have left you better off,' he would murmur twenty times in the day.

At first she answered him, 'What does it matter? Oh, dear papa, don't let my future trouble you; let nothing trouble you now.' By which she meant nothing but solicitude for his own future.

Mr. Josceline's only world, however, was the world he knew thoroughly; and though he was careful not to say so, she came by degrees and very unwillingly to be aware of this. She found it of no use to hint to him of heavenly things, and how, being his daughter, could she do more than hint of them to him? She was compelled to content herself, when he would begin anew to speak of the poverty he had entailed on her, to answer nothing, but only to smile on him (a smile it cost her agonies to compass), and shake her head in deprecation of the topic. On the morning after his seizure the Doctor found his patient had rallied, so much so that if there had been any road to recovery, it would have been a good sign; but there was no road.

'Mr. Vernon and Mr. Felspar have come to inquire after you,' he said, in that cheery but pitiful tone which in the sick room implies so much.

'Mr. Vernon! I should like to see Mr. Vernon,' murmured the patient.

'Oh, papa, are you equal to it?' pleaded Ella anxiously. Mr. Josceline had closed his eyes, but the Doctor answered for him: 'Your father knows best, my dear young lady; it is better not to thwart him.'

It was the same case with him now (as she well understood, poor girl) as with those who, in their last hours, fancy this or that to eat; they are given what they like, since nothing can harm (nor, alas! help) them.

While some one was being despatched for the young man, Mr. Josceline withdrew his hand from Ella's grasp. 'Leave me, darling; it will be but for a minute.'

She obeyed him instantly, yet not before her gaze had met Mr. Vernon's as he entered the room. The expression of his face was very soft and sad (she knew he was pitying her from

the very bottom of his heart), but it wore scarce a sign of recognition. His eyes turned reverently towards the bed, on which lay the dying man. It was the natural action of a gentle nature; but if he had been the most sagacious of schemers he could not have found a nearer road to the young girl's heart.

Mr. Josceline made a sign to his visitor to take Ella's vacant chair. 'You did not expect to see me so soon again,' he whispered, 'nor like this.'

Vernon would have uttered some commonplace of hope or comfort, but the sick man held up a warning finger.

'There is no time for smooth speeches; I am dying. One thing alone comforts me. What I spoke to you about the other day, when you brought the picture, has come to pass. My daughter's future has been secured.'

In spite of his effort at self-command, Vernon turned pale; he asked some question with his lips which his tongue refused to utter.

'Yes, in that way,' answered the dying

man, who understood him perfectly; 'she is engaged, or as good as engaged, to be married. You have no right to complain of it, and you have no power to prevent it.'

Vernon shook his head and smiled bitterly. 'I know it,' he murmured.

'Nevertheless,' continued the other, 'a base and wicked man, who only thought about himself, might, in your place, do my daughter much hurt.'

'God forbid.'

'I say "Amen" to that. Remember the promise you gave to me the other day. The time has come earlier than we expected for its fulfilment, that is all. There was then one alternative—the thousand a year. I have no breath to lose—are you listening?'

'Yes, yes.'

He was listening, though his gaze had wandered from the sick man to the door through which Ella had passed into an inner room.

'There is now only one course. She will leave this place at once. Do you understand?'

'I will keep my promise,' answered the young man hoarsely.

'I believe your word. You have an honest heart; you are not a liar. Good-bye.'

Vernon put his hand in the dying man's, who clasped it feebly. 'Do not see her, neither now nor afterwards; go at once. Remember, remember.'

Vernon rose slowly. He felt as one who carries a great burden. The vigour and elasticity of his limbs seemed to have departed. He moved slowly and mournfully out of the room. Ella glided in and took her place once more by the bedside.

'An honest lad, a good lad,' murmured the sick man, unconscious of her presence. 'A hard lot; a hard world.' Then he raised his eyelids and beheld her. 'What was I saying, darling? Was I dreaming?'

'You said it was a hard world, dear papa.'

'Then I was not dreaming,' was the bitter rejoinder. After a while his mind began to wander, or so it seemed to her who listened to its utterances.

'I wish I had married her,' he muttered. 'In a fortnight—in a month at most—I could have saved her.'

'Saved whom, dear papa?'

'You.'

His mind, she thought, was certainly wandering, and as often happens, it continued to harp on the same string. 'Only a few weeks more and she would have been beyond the reach of want,' he murmured. 'Would that I had married her! Too late! too late! I tried to do it, darling, for your sake.'

'Tried to do what, dear papa?' inquired Ella, more to soothe him than with any expectation of getting a reasonable reply.

'To marry the Jennynges.'

'The Jennynges! Do you mean Miss Jennynge? Oh, papa!' exclaimed Ella, so horrified at her father's words that for a moment she forgot his condition.

'No, not Anastasia; her mother. I could have got half her money settled upon you.'

'Is it I, or my father, who is out of his

wits?' was Ella's first reflection, 'or can my ears have been mistaken?' But though Mr. Josceline's voice was low, it was not indistinct; and though his eyes were dim they showed no sign of mental aberration. He lay quite quiet, and with a melancholy and thoughtful face, like one who reviews that past which he cannot recall. All the dim suspicions that had ever flitted across her mind, about her father scheming for her supposed welfare, now took definite shape. They shocked her, but aroused no indignation against him. She even felt a pity for his disappointment in them, though she did not share it. Nay, she felt grateful to him; for though he had been so mistaken and so wrong, had he not done all, or failed in all, for her sake? And yet it was so terrible to her that his mind should be occupied with such reflections at such a time. 'Dearest papa,' she whispered tenderly, 'don't think about such matters any more. I shall do very well.'

'Yes, yes,' he answered eagerly, 'if you are only prudent. A prize, a great prize, is within

your grasp. Remember when I am gone, you have no friend, no home, and, alas, alas! you are penniless.'

'Do not think of me, dear papa.'

'Whom then should I think of?' replied the dying man, with irritation. Then in feebler and broken tones, 'Would that I had thought of you earlier! That is what weighs upon me now, heavier than the hand of death itself.'

Perceiving that it was useless to attempt to divert him from this all-engrossing topic, Ella strove to find some crumb of comfort in the wished-for direction.

'You are well-born, dear papa, and have rich relations. Since the contemplation of the future troubles you so, why not apply to them?'

'Never,' replied the dying man through his clenched teeth. 'Never. They would spurn you from their doors. If they opened them, and you went in, I would never forgive you. Curse them!'

'Oh, papa, papa, pray do not speak so. I will never ask them for a penny; I will not be indebted to them for a night's lodging. Be

assured of that, since you forbid me. But do not speak so.'

'A girl of spirit,' he murmured approvingly. 'Her father's child. There is some money in my desk, and there is some more due at the month's end, if I live to claim it. It is but ten days to the end of the month; but there—I might as well say it is but ten years. Listen, listen! Mrs. Wallace is a good woman; stick to Mrs. Wallace. Go with her away from this. I trust his word, but he must not see you. I tell you, you must go away.'

'I will do whatever you wish, papa.'

'A good girl. Her father's darling, his *darling*. You will give him your address; and tell him he may write to you.'

Again Ella doubted her own ears. Was it possible that after all he was not averse to her correspondence with Mr. Vernon? She did not think of him as her lover. 'All these things had ceased to be,' in the awful shadow of the coming presence, but she recalled the fact that her father had objected to her forming any intimacy with the young man.

'Ask him,' continued Mr. Josceline, 'since you are going away, to let you have his photograph to put in your locket; that will seem only natural. Do you hear me!'

'I hear you, dear papa; but are you speaking of Mr. Aird?'

'Of course I am.' Again he expressed himself with vigour, and the effort it cost him seemed to deprive him of all remaining strength. After a long pause he spoke once more, in a voice perceptibly weaker, 'You said you would do all I wish, Ella; and this is my dying wish — that you should marry Mr. Aird.'

'Marry Mr. Aird!' The words dropped from her lips one by one as though to assure herself they were indeed the same she had heard and not counterfeit; she looked up into her father's face with an amazement that turned suddenly to horror by reason of what she saw there.

'Doctor Cooper, Doctor Cooper!' she cried out, and in a moment the doctor was standing beside her. He glanced a moment at the life-

less, lightless features, and then gently but firmly took her hand.

'You must come away, my dear young lady,' he said; 'your father is no longer here.'

'He is not dead,' she cried. 'Oh no; he cannot be dead. He was not thinking of death, he was only thinking of me.'

'He was quite right,' returned the doctor, calmly. 'He was thinking of your future and not his own. I honour him for it. Kiss him, child, and come away.'

He spoke to her and treated her as if she had really been but a child. He held her while she stooped down and kissed the dead man's face; he supported her with his arm into the next room, and, placing her in a chair with her white face hid in her hands, he left her alone with her sorrow. The blow had utterly overwhelmed her, its suddenness had been so far merciful that it had numbed her sense of loss; the retina of her mind was at first only able to retain its last impression. Could it be possible that that was a correct one? The wildest nightmare dream she had ever experienced had

never suggested to her anything more monstrous than the injunction that had dropped from her dying father's lips. Yet there were the words engraved as it were with some acid that burned into her very core, 'I wish you to marry Mr. Aird.' Presently they began to fade away before the slowly growing perception of what had happened afterwards. He was dead. His voice, his smile, were gone. The kindly gracious man who called her daughter, and whom all the little world she had ever known bowed down to in admiration, was no more. The circumstance of her own desolation did not strike her at first so much as a vague sense of loss. She beheld the general void rather than the empty place beside her. Then came the isolation; the awful sense of her utter loneliness in the world. Not a soul to care for her, not one human being bound to her by tie of blood or nearness. No heart to love her. Here a little hand stole into her own, and a child's voice whispered tenderly in her ear, 'Don't cry, Ella: don't cry, darling. We are so sorry for you. I do love you so. Don't you know me? I'm little Davey.'

Then the tears came for the first time; she threw her arms about the child and hugged him to her bosom; and hid her face in his, and sobbed with him and he with her, as though their hearts would break together.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

THERE is plenty of kindness in the world—but largely mingled with the fear of incurring responsibility. In our hour of sorrow, that much-despised class of persons who act on instinct come to the front, and win our hearts while the wise and the prudent are picking their words. The promises of the former may be pie-crust, but their present sympathy is sincere and of incalculable value. They do not give twice but ten times over who give quickly; and even if they have nothing to give, their obvious desire to be of service is a material help.

The touch of little Davey's cheek as it nestled up to Ella's was worth very much to her, though it might not have been favourably

discounted in the City. When she looked out through her dim eyes at the world again, there was sunshine in it—a streak of light among the menacing masses of cloud.

'Papa told me to say, only I forgot it,' said Davey, 'that whatever you wished should be done at once. That he was—I don't remember what he said exactly—but I know he loves you almost as much as I do.'

The streak of light vanished away from poor Ella's mental horizon, and a sharp chill, as from a November sky, seized her.

'Tell your father that I am obliged to him,' she answered firmly; 'but that I want nothing. You should not stop here, darling. It is not fit for you. Go and play.'

Nothing loth, for a child is soon tired of another's sorrow, Davey got off her lap. 'I'll give papa your love,' he said. 'Shall I?'

'Tell him what I told you to say, Davey; that I am obliged to him—deeply obliged to him—but that I want nothing.'

There was a knock at the door; the same door at which the child had doubtless entered,

not that which opened into the chamber of death. Ella's heart beat fast. Was it possible, while her father's body was hardly cold, that Mr. Aird should himself be coming to offer assistance to her in person?

That such an idea should have entered her mind—that any thought at all should have done so save that of her bereavement, may seem strange; but the fact was that the one fact suggested the other. Her father, and her father's dying words, were for the moment indissolubly associated in her mind together.

'Oh, Mrs. Wallace!' The pathetic welcome in her voice would have moved a harder heart than that of the wife of the Devonshire yeoman. There was genuine gratitude in it, but also an expression of relief which of course that lady did not understand.

'My pretty dear,' she sobbed—'my own pretty dear! What *can* we do for you?'

She did not mean what she could do herself, nor what she and her husband could do (though that, of course, was included), but what could the whole world do for this desolate and

orphaned girl, to show its tenderness and sympathy? She did not know that she herself was a woman of ten thousand. She spoke believing herself to be a common type of humanity, and had come to comfort her in the name of it. She was one of those simple ones who, in all sincerity, would have asked, 'When saw we thee hungry and gave thee meat?' It was her nature to do such things and not to remember them. Ella could only blindly kiss her, and thank her with a hand-clasp.

'You must not stay here, my darling,' continued the old lady. 'You must come into my room. John has moved out of it.'

Ella shook her head, and pointed to the next room. 'I cannot leave him,' she whispered.

'He will be as near you there as here, my darling. He is in heaven.'

'I know, I know—but——'

In the end, however, Ella was persuaded; on a promise being given her that she should see her father once more and bid him her last farewell, she suffered herself to be led up to

Mrs. Wallace's apartment. It opened into a little sitting room, where she could be alone or not as she pleased, but the companionship of such a kind friend—one who never spoke unless speech was desirable, and had a hundred ways of showing sympathy without officiousness —was an incalculable blessing to her. The world was no longer a solitude to her with Mrs. Wallace sitting beside her; and in the silent watches of the night, when Despair might otherwise have taken possession of her, it was driven away by the presence of the simple farmer's wife, as though she had been some guardian angel with flaming sword. On the second day, Mrs. Trant came up to see Ella, when she chanced to be alone.

'I would have come earlier, Miss, but that I feared to intrude,' she said; and she spoke truth. She was an honest, kindly woman, but she was a landlady. The death of a guest is the very last thing—save the breaking out of an infectious disorder—which such persons wish to happen under their roof. In the case of the demise of the Hon. George Emilius Josceline,

however, there were some mitigating circumstances: it looked well in the papers, and would advertise the hotel, and no doubt the family (represented by Ella) of such an illustrious individual would see that she suffered no pecuniary loss from the catastrophe. In the meantime, certain sad matters needed to be arranged, or rather, she required Miss Josceline's authority for the arrangement of them.

'There is a most respectable person, my dear young lady, at Lawton, accustomed to do all that is right and proper in these cases, and for the best families in the county, and you have only to say "Yes" to me, and everything shall be arranged without any trouble to you, and, you may be sure, to your satisfaction.'

'Do you mean about the—the—funeral?' gasped poor Ella.

'Yes, my dear young lady. Mr. Scarf is in the house now waiting for orders. Whether you wish your poor dear father to be carried to the family vault or not, I don't know, but——'

Ella shook her head. It was probable that

her father's relatives would have closed it against him, as they had shut their doors against him when alive; and, in any case, it would not have been his wish, she knew, to lie there.

'Then of course he will be buried here; that is to say, at Barton: it's a beautiful graveyard, Miss,' said Mrs. Trant, consolingly, 'and as quiet as'—she was about to say 'the grave,' but her fine literary taste revolted against the tautology—'as quiet as any gentleman could wish, I am sure. You would like a simple funeral., no doubt?'

'Yes,' said Ella, speaking like one in a dream.

'If you desire it, Miss, Mr. Scarf bade me to say that he would furnish an estimate; but you would probably wish things, he thought, to be in accordance with the deceased's position.'

'I have not much money,' said Ella doubtfully; 'I hardly know what to say.'

Her position was pitiable indeed, for the five bank-notes the dead man had left in his desk were all she had in the world; and yet it

seemed to her (as it seems to many wiser people who, under similar circumstances, are wont to lose their wits, to the great advantage of the undertaking fraternity) so shocking that she should interfere with any proposed arrangement to bury her father as became his rank.

'But what you have by you, Miss,' argued the landlady, 'is of no consequence, whether it be much or little. Mr. Scarf will give you any amount of credit.'

'You do not understand, Mrs. Trant; I am very poor,' said Ella frankly.

Of course Mrs. Trant did not understand; that people who came to stop at the *Ultramarine*, and in a carriage and four, should be 'very poor,' was incomprehensible to her. If it was really so in this case, she was very sorry for the young lady; but it was not without satisfaction that she reflected that the custom of the house was for visitors to settle their bills weekly, and that Mr. Josceline had just paid his little account.

'But have you no friends or relatives, Miss,

who will be coming down to the funeral, and who will, of course, arrange——'

'No; I have no friends,' said Ella firmly, almost defiantly. In some respects Mrs. Trant's visit had done her good: it had raised her from that condition of morbid melancholy in which death had plunged her, and compelled her to look life in the face.

'I am very sorry, my good young lady,' returned the landlady, her manner already grown more familiar from the knowledge of the financial position of her guest. 'I didn't mean to wound you, Heaven knows. I'll tell Mr. Scarf to be as economical as possible, consistent with what is due to your dear father's birth, and so on'—in which last words she privately included the reputation of the hotel.

At this moment Mrs. Wallace entered the room. There was something, perhaps, in the landlady's face—a certain lack of sympathy, or an expression which betrayed self-interest—which at once attracted her attention. 'What is the matter, Mrs. Trant?'

'Oh nothing, ma'am, I'm sure,' returned the other apologetically. 'I only came up to speak a few words to Miss Josceline about a matter of business.' And she signified by a sympathetic sigh what sort of business it was.

'Then you should not have spoken to her upon any such subject,' said Mrs. Wallace, with a severity little short of that which she had used to Mrs. Armytage. 'You remember what Dr. Cooper said.'

'Oh yes; and likewise what was told me by your good husband and Mr. Aird. Miss Josceline' (and here she turned towards that young lady with a deprecatory smile) 'talks of having no friends, but I am sure she has plenty of 'em. "Don't let her be troubled," says one, "Leave everything to me," says another; but still, I thought it best to have things done upon her own authority.'

'You thought quite right, Mrs. Trant,' said Ella, interposing, 'and did quite right, and I am much obliged to you.'

She appreciated the kindness of the good Doctor, and of Mr. Wallace, but from the assist-

ance which it seemed had been proffered by Mr. Aird her soul revolted. That he had meant it as kindly as the rest she did not doubt; but her father's dying words with respect to him had made any offer of service at his hands not only unwelcome, but absolutely hateful to her, and she felt grateful to Mrs. Trant for having rendered it ineffectual. 'Dear Mrs. Wallace,' she continued, when the landlady had gone, 'you must not treat me as your goodness, and gentleness, and consideration suggest. It is not true kindness, though you mean it as such. It is like putting into a hothouse for a few days a plant which has to live in the open air.' Then she explained to her, in as few words as possible, what indeed she had already hinted to her before, her true position in the world, and the absolute hopelessness of its being bettered by any assistance from her family or otherwise. 'It is necessary,' she said, 'for me to make my own living, for as to what my poor father has left behind him, it will only enable me at most to start clear of debt.

Mrs. Wallace's face exhibited not only grief and sympathy, but a certain shocked surprise, that to Ella's sensitive mind at once suggested blame of the dead man.

'I have had a happy girlhood,' she continued, 'and have nothing to complain of. Never had daughter a more loving father. To make a provision for my future was his ruling thought, as I have good cause to know; but opportunity was denied him; he had a tolerable income, but only, I believe, a life interest in it.'

Those words 'I believe' sounded very pitifully; they betrayed not only the girl's ignorance, but the simplicity which had prevented her from making inquiries into a subject so material to her welfare. Her well-meant apology for her father went, indeed, but a very little way with her companion; but Mrs. Wallace was one of that small minority who, instead of indulging their virtuous indignation against evildoers, devote themselves to remedy the evil.

'My dear Ella,' she said, 'what you say is very sad and very serious, but I need not tell you

that there are worse losses in this world than the loss of money. Matters of business must be looked to, of course, but under present circumstances I don't think it is right you should be troubled with pounds, shillings, and pence, and I hope you will let me be your Chancellor of the Exchequer. We are thrifty folk in Devon, and you will not find me wasteful nor extravagant; and I think I know what you would wish.'

With heartfelt thanks Ella accepted this kind proposal, for, to say the truth, the prospect of a personal interview with Mr. Scarf sent a shiver through her. It is not every one, however sensible in other respects, who has the toughness of fibre for such things. For example, in the case of most persons, I am sure that the desire of 'seeing the last,' as it is called, of their lost dear ones, after 'life and thought have gone away' from the empty house, is a grievous error. 'The rapture of repose' of which the poet sings may be in the dead man's face, but it is not always there; and even if it be, it is not the expression which is familiar to

us, and only too often effaces for ever the beloved lineaments to which we have been accustomed. In Mr. Josceline's case, he looked in death, as Mrs. Trant described it (honestly enough, though the knowledge that his bill had been settled might have added a seraphic touch or two), 'like an angel.' The calmness which the features had always worn was there, and the smile—but with an inexplicable difference. Every one said who saw him that it spoke of heaven, but nevertheless (or perhaps, as the cynical would have said, for that very reason) it did not speak of *him*. There was nothing to shock her, but Ella secretly regretted that her pious desire to wish him that last good-bye had been gratified. And somehow in consequence she afterwards felt a greater relief than she otherwise would have done in 'all the arrangements' having been left in Mrs. Wallace's hands. In relieving her of that melancholy duty, however, that lady had no intention of giving her young friend leisure and opportunity to indulge in fruitless grief: her own recent experience of bereavement had taught her that the best

remedy for the torn and tender heart is occupation of the mind.

'Since you tell me, my darling, that your dear father's latest thoughts were occupied with your future,' she said, 'it can be no unkindness or disrespect to him—but the reverse—to think of the same thing. It must be done sooner or later, and the longer you put it off (because your decision, in that case, must needs be more or less hurried) the more difficult you will find it to come to any conclusion.'

Mrs. Wallace spoke very slowly, because it was not an easy matter with her to express her ideas, and with a certain gentle earnestness that went home to the young girl's heart, at least as much as the logic of her argument. Ella's reply was but a pressure of the hand, but it encouraged her to proceed.

'Now are you quite sure, my dear, to begin with, that you have really no relative to take an interest in you? It seems incredible, being what you are, that this should be so.'

'Nevertheless, dear Mrs. Wallace, it is so,' answered Ella, calmly. 'My father had rela-

tives, but they have ill-treated him, and I would rather beg my bread of the world at large than be indebted to them for a crust.'

It was on the lips of Mrs. Wallace to say, 'Have you no relatives by the mother's side?' but something restrained her. It had not escaped her notice that Ella had never spoken of her mother.

'Well, that clears the ground for us at once,' she answered cheerfully. 'My husband has a great idea of people sticking to their own "kith and kin;" but if they decline to stick, they are not postage-stamps, that you can make them do it. When one has no relatives—or as good as none—it is clear one must turn to one's friends.'

'I have no friend in the world but my old schoolmistress,' replied Ella, simply. 'It was to her I was thinking of writing. I am very ignorant, but I understand French, and perhaps, if I could get some lessons, I could learn to draw sufficiently well to teach quite little girls.'

Mrs. Wallace shook her head.

'I was afraid I was overrating my powers,' sighed Ella, 'but in time, perhaps——'

'I didn't mean that,' interposed her companion, quickly. 'Why, you draw beautifully already, I am sure; and as to French, though I know nothing about it, I heard Mr. Felspar (who has lived in foreign parts) say you talk like a native. But, bless you, my pretty dear, you would never do for a schoolmistress.'

'Why not?'

'Well, for one thing—though there are hosts of other objections—the English master, and the French master, and the music master, and all the masters, would all be falling in love with you; and that, you may depend upon it, the schoolmistress wouldn't like. Seriously, such a line of life would be very unsuited to you, my dear, and I am sure very distasteful.'

Ella shook her head with a sad smile, as though she would have said, 'Beggars cannot be choosers.'

'When you said you had no friends, Ella,' continued Mrs. Wallace after a little pause, 'I hope you intend to make the reserva-

tion, "except those I have made under this roof."'

'Where I have been three or four weeks at most,' interrupted Ella gently.

'Time has nothing to do with making friends, though it has everything to do with *trying* them, my dear. I shall not pay myself the bad compliment of supposing you include me among your mere acquaintances. Being a young lady of good manners, you meant of course to except the present company.'

'I am sure, dear Mrs. Wallace,' said Ella hesitatingly, 'that you are everything that is good and kind; but——'

'Now don't spoil such a pretty speech with "buts,"' interposed her companion. 'I hope, indeed, I intend to be of service to you; but I confess that selfishness enters largely into the proposition I am about to make, and which (though, since you know him, it is hardly worth while to put that in) will, I know, have my husband's approbation. We have lately, as you know, experienced a sad loss; the death of our niece has made our return home painful to

both of us. She was of the same age as yourself, or nearly so, and of such a similar nature that John has often said to me, "Does not Miss Josceline remind you of our darling?" Will you oblige us, my dear, by returning with us to Devonshire, and taking her dear place there, and in both our hearts? Stop a bit. Of course there are many objections; it is not, I know, the sort of life to which you have been accustomed; nor are we the sort of people. If any relatives of your own were half as willing and eager to receive you as we are, we should feel that they had an indisputable claim to you; but, being free to choose a home for yourself, why not choose ours? At all events, let us persuade you to try it. Just at present society would not be to your taste. The very simplicity of our mode of life would, I think, be agreeable to you.' Then, seeing a strange look in her companion's face, she added, 'You are not offended, my dear?'

'Hush! hush!' exclaimed Ella, throwing her arms about the kind old lady. 'When you talk like that I begin to doubt more than ever

whether what you have said can be real; whether such good and kind people as you and your husband can actually exist. If I don't answer as I should—if I don't thank you as I ought—it is because your goodness and generosity overwhelm me.'

'Now, that is a mistake, my dear,' observed Mrs. Wallace gravely; 'our motives, as I have already said, are selfish. We want you—I heard Professor Armytage use the very term the other day, so I'm sure it's right—to supply a void. It's quite possible you mayn't like it: you may find Foracre Farm intolerably dull; but "all we ask," as the advertisers of cheap goods say, is, "Give us a trial." Now I look on that much, at least, as settled.'

If there had been time, or opportunity, to have summed up all the thoughts in her heart, Ella might no doubt have found objections to Mrs. Wallace's generous proposition. For one thing, it seemed terrible to her, just at present, to remove herself so far from the dear remains of him she had lost. It seemed a sort of desertion of him to leave him lying in his lonely

grave, and to depart so far away. Again, though this had far less weight with her, she felt that at the Devonshire farmhouse she would of necessity be cut off from all sources of instruction in that art by the pursuit of which she had fondly hoped to gain her bread. But these things, even if they had occurred to her at the moment—which they did not—would have been swept away in the strong tide of gratitude that filled her bosom. But an hour ago the whole world seemed to have been closed against her—she had pictured herself wandering round its iron walls without hope of a loophole; and now, not only had a door been opened to her, but from it there had looked forth a face of unmistakable love and welcome. She did not contemplate being a lifelong burden upon her new-found friends—her independent spirit would have revolted against that; but she appreciated and was deeply grateful for the opportunity thus offered to her of 'looking about her,' of turning over in her mind at her leisure some course of conduct for the future.

Like some drowning wretch unexpectedly cast upon some hospitable shore, instead of being left to struggle with the waves and be dashed against the rocks, she had only to be thankful.

CHAPTER XXX.

A CHARITABLE COMMITTEE.

Of all the pleasures of the exercise of charity, the very greatest (to some minds), though it is not generally mentioned among the attributes of that divine gift, is the satisfaction afforded by the fact of the recipient of our bounty having once occupied a social position equal or superior to our own. This is the *ne plus ultra* of the delights of patronage, and makes the actions of the just smell sweet (in their own nostrils) indeed. The sensation of heaping coals of fire on an enemy may be pleasant and comfortable, but the experience of which I speak confers a happiness infinitely beyond it, a self-complacency of the soul.

On the day before that fixed for the interment of Mr. Josceline, and when all that Mrs.

Armytage had advanced against that gentleman had been fully corroborated (in the view of her late audience, at least) by Ella's confession of poverty made to Mrs. Trant, a meeting of the guests in the *Ultramarine* was held in the ladies' drawing-room to take that young person's sad case into consideration, and to concert measures for her immediate relief.

The company were convened by circular, issued by Mrs. Armytage, which as a literary composition had afforded her as much satisfaction as was compatible with the melancholy circumstances of its origin—and even more. She had shown it to the Professor himself, and inquired whether it needed any addition. He had replied 'Most certainly not,' in a tone of the most genuine conviction. This benevolent lady's appeal had been responded to; and the company at the *Ultramarine* had 'rallied round her' (to borrow a phrase from the circular) with a unanimity even beyond her expectations.

Not only did all the lady-guests put in an appearance (except Mrs. Wallace, of whom, as

Mrs. Armytage observed, 'much delicacy of social feeling could hardly be expected,' and who remained abovestairs with Ella), but all the gentlemen. This latter circumstance, however, in no way abashed the Professor's wife: the fact of the assemblage being held in the ladies' drawing-room made it, as she observed, a woman's question, and she would, therefore, make no apology for taking the chair. Mr. Aird, with little Davey by his side, looking more fragile and delicate than ever, no less from his recent illness than from his present sorrow on Ella's account, was the only one who even ventured to point out the desirability of her being voted into it. 'On an occasion of this kind, sir,' she had observed reprovingly, 'cold formalities may, I think, be dispensed with.'

'Very good, madam, I hope they will be,' was his quiet reply. She did not understand the cynicism of his remark, but she felt him to be an incongruous element in her scheme of benevolence; just as a spirit-rapper objects to the individual who is 'not *en rapport* with supernatural manifestations,'—the doubter.

When Mrs. Armytage rose from her seat with a manuscript in her hand (for she was not going to spoil the effect of her carefully composed speech by its *vivâ voce* delivery, in which something might have been forgotten), and all the company had arranged themselves with serious faces before her in a semicircle, the scene was really an imposing one.

As Mr. Percival Lott whispered to his wife, 'It's like hearing the reading of a will by a blessed female attorney!'

Every one assumed an attitude of rapt attention, including the Professor, who however was secretly occupied with the investigation of a fine specimen (captured that very morning) of the stag beetle, which he held in the hollow of his hand, and regarded with a tender solemnity, very appropriate for the occasion; he had already heard his wife's 'appeal to the charitable' three times, so that any diversion of his mind could hardly be called inexcusable. The appeal, however admirable as a literary composition, was a little long, so we will 'take it as read,' after the excellent example of wise

princes when addresses are presented to them. Let it suffice to say that it set forth, with considerable unction, how Miss Ella Josceline had been nursed in the lap of luxury—a luxury, alas! that had been anything but warranted by her circumstances—and was now dependent upon charity for her daily bread; and that it ended with an application for subscriptions. 'For my own part,' said Mrs. Armytage, in conclusion, 'speaking for myself and the Professor, we feel that money in such a case is but of small service in comparison with a permanent provision for the future, which it is my intention to offer to the young lady under my own roof.'

Here there were almost universal signs of approbation. It was felt to be an immense relief by everybody, that the responsibility of providing something—permanent or otherwise—for Miss Josceline was removed from their own shoulders; and in their satisfaction they almost forgave Mrs. Armytage for having called them together, as it seemed, to bear witness to her own benevolence. For once the feeling of

the company was with her (since the interruption might have induced a change in her good intentions) when Mr. Aird, in his dryest manner, begged to inquire of Mrs. Armytage whether the details of her scheme of providence were a dead secret, or whether she would mind revealing the nature of that permanent provision for Miss Ella Josceline which she had in her mind. The inquiry from such a mouth was an embarrassing one; though Mrs. Armytage had really spoken what, for a person of her type of character, might have been termed the truth. The term 'permanent provision' was a euphemism for the offer of the post of companion to herself. Her imagination was flattered by the idea of having a grand-daughter of the Earl of Boroughby in a state of dependency; and she had persuaded herself that something of the sort was demanded by her position in society, and by what she was accustomed to call her 'needs.' She had even rehearsed the little speech in which she proposed to break this dazzling prospect to Ella herself.

'I shall repose the greatest confidence in

you, my dear girl, which one human being can entrust to another' was one of its sentences, which, when it came 'to be fried,' meant that she should delegate to her the duties of combing Fido and cutting her canary's claws. But of course she could not explain this to Mr. Aird.

'Indeed, sir,' she said, 'I must claim to keep my own counsel in matters relative to my own affairs.'

'Very good,' replied Mr. Aird. 'Only if you are going to provide for the young lady in so munificent a fashion, why send for us?'

There was a murmur of approbation. Every one felt that since Mrs. Armytage was playing the part of Lady Bountiful, it was better that she should go through with it. To ask for subscriptions from other people was to spoil a ship for a pound of tar.

'I thought I had explained,' said Mrs. Armytage with frigidity, 'that the young lady in question is almost destitute. My proposal is that we should all help to start her in life. The rest—supposing she accepts my offer, which I conclude may be taken for granted—may be

left to me. But since I have taken that responsibility on my shoulders, it will hardly be expected that I should give anything more than a very moderate sum towards her immediate expenses. The Professor and I have agreed that, under the circumstances, a five-pound note——'

'Ten,' interrupted the Professor, looking up for one instant from his entomological studies.

'I think we said five, my dear.'

'*I* said ten,' repeated the Professor, 'and I shall give ten.'

Mrs. Armytage flashed a glance at her husband, calculated to shrivel him. But he was stroking a wing of his beetle, and consequently unconscious of it.

'Very good,' she said—they were words full of significance—'*very* good; ten pounds.'

'And very handsome of you, I'm sure,' said Mrs. Jennynge. Her anger against the dead man, who, from recent revelations, stood convicted in her mind of the design—which indeed he had entertained—of obtaining a large slice of her property, burnt fiercely within her, and

extended to his innocent daughter. Moreover, she was by nature desperately averse to part with that the possession of which she was secretly aware alone made her palatable to her fellow-creatures, her money.

'It is true, Mrs. Armytage,' she continued, 'that your acquaintance with the late Mr. Josceline, as you used often to tell us, was much closer than that of the rest of us, and his daughter has therefore a peculiar claim upon you. Nevertheless, I repeat that your proposed subscription does great credit to your liberality. It had passed through my own mind to offer the young lady some such position as it seems you yourself have already decided upon. I thought she might have made herself useful as a companion to my own Anastasia; but it is perhaps best as it is. To one who undertakes any such employment, a superfluity of means is obviously incongruous; and it seems to me that the sum proposed is amply sufficient. I hope, however, I am not one to turn a deaf ear to the sacred calls of charity. You may put my name down, ma'am, for five guineas.'

While Mrs. Armytage was entering this munificent donation on a sheet of paper she had provided for that purpose, calculated by its dimensions for the entry of a million of money, Mr. Percival Lott whispered to his wife, 'I am really afraid that poor girl will be very miserable with Mrs. Armytage; if you would like to have such a person about you, my dear—when I am obliged to be away from you—I shouldn't mind her salary.'

The suspected bride gave him a look that froze all further utterance: I am afraid that she deemed that phrase, 'when I am obliged to be away from you,' a perfect masterpiece of audacious duplicity. She did not deign to answer him, but observed quietly to Mrs. Armytage, 'And I also will give five guineas.'

'That is 20*l.* 10*s.*,' remarked that lady, looking round her like an auctioneer in expectation of a bid. Her indignation against her husband had passed away; she was not sorry, upon the whole, that her offer had been more generous than that of the other two ladies. It struck her, however, that she was

at present responsible for the extra subscriptions, and that Mrs. Jennynge, in particular, might be more ready with her promise than her performance. 'I think the money had better be paid at once,' she said, 'in order to save confusion.'

The Professor and Mr. Percival Lott produced their respective subscriptions with much alacrity, but the manner in which Mrs. Jennynge fumbled with the contents of her purse caused Mrs. Armytage to congratulate herself upon her caution; every pound seemed to cost her a drop of blood, and the parting with her very shillings to be analagous to having five of her hairs pulled separately out by the roots.

'And now, Mr. Wallace, what are *you* going to give us?' inquired Mrs. Armytage cheerfully, and with a look round at her audience as though something humorously vulgar was going to happen, such as the production of a half-crown in coppers.

'Well, madam, I hardly know,' hesitated the farmer. What he meant was that the whole affair had failed to recommend itself to

him, and that he should like to have counsel's opinion before committing himself to it.

'Hardly know!' echoed Mrs. Armytage sharply. 'You must surely know whether you mean to give five pounds or five shillings.'

'It is not that, ma'am,' returned Mr. Wallace, scratching his head confusedly. 'The fact is, I must ask my wife.'

'A very wise thing to do,' said Mrs. Armytage, with marked approval. 'We will put your subscription last—last but not least, I hope we shall be able to say, when Mrs. Wallace has fixed the figure. Now, Mr. Aird, what shall I put your name down for? I am sure you will not be backward where everybody else has behaved with—well, I may say with such surprising liberality.'

'Quite the right term, I'm sure, for it,' said Mr. Aird with a dry cough. 'Well, I have not quite made up my mind, but I'll give something; let me know before you send in the list, only mind there must be no name mentioned.'

'But why should not Miss Josceline know,'

inquired Mrs. Armytage, conscious of her superior donation, 'to which of her kind friends she is relatively indebted for assistance?'

'Because it would be painful to her, madam, and increase her sense of personal obligation.'

'There,' said Mrs. Jennynge, very willing that her five guineas should make the same appearance in the eyes of the recipient as Mrs. Armytage's ten pounds, 'I quite agree with Mr. Aird.'

'So do I,' said Mrs. Lott. 'The making the subscriptions anonymous renders it so much more delicate.'

'Just as you like,' replied Mrs. Armytage with indifference. On reflection, she perceived that nothing would be easier than to convey to her future 'companion' the fact that her subscription had been the largest. 'I am sure I am the last person to wish to appear ostentatious. But you see we are collecting the money, Mr. Aird. Is it that you have no notes or gold about you?'

Mr. Aird nodded assent. 'I'll write you a cheque,' he said.

'A cheque can hardly be drawn for such a purpose for less than five pounds,' observed Mrs. Armytage persuasively.

'You may calculate on that amount, madam,' answered the other quietly.

Whereupon, Mrs. Armytage smiled a gracious smile. Of the performance of any promise of Mr. Aird's she had no doubt, and upon the whole she felt that he had behaved with unexpected docility. 'Putting down Mr. Aird's contribution at five pounds, at least, ladies and gentlemen,' observed the Chair, with modest self-obliteration, 'we have now collected no less than 25*l.* 10*s.*, upon which I think you may well congratulate yourselves, as well as the fortunate recipient of your bounty. I will make it my business to inform her at once of the result of this, I may say, most successful meeting. It is probable that the expenses incident to the melancholy event that is to take place to-morrow may be weighing on her mind, and it may be a relief to her——'

'No.'

The monosyllable was uttered by Mr. Aird, and in a voice so confident and authoritative that it had the effect of a full stop upon Mrs. Armytage's eloquence. It produced, indeed, a total silence, during which Mr. Aird coolly entered into a whispered conversation with his neighbour, Mr. Wallace, who presently, to the great astonishment of the company, thus addressed it:

'I beg pardon, gentlemen and ladies, but I have it from my wife, who is in close attendance on Miss Josceline, that that young lady is at present not in a condition to discuss business affairs, or to receive a visit from any person. With your permission, I will inform my wife of what has occurred, and she will herself communicate your kind intentions to Miss Josceline.'

'Intentions!' ejaculated Mrs. Armytage, pointing to the little heap of notes and gold. 'I should say those were something more than intentions.'

'Very good, let us say "effects,"' observed

Mr. Aird dryly. 'What Mr. Wallace has remarked, however, seems to me conclusive. Any visit to Miss Josceline at present would be obviously an intrusion; whereas, through an intimate friend, such as she has now with her, the communication which we are considering can be conveyed to her without offence.'

Mrs. Armytage did not reply in words, but she sniffed audibly. A sniff from such a woman is like a shake of the head from a physician, full of significance. What it meant on this occasion was that all this delicate consideration for the feelings of an impecunious young person was deplorable and out of place. At the best, it was but delaying the evil day in store for her. At the worst, it was leading her still further into that fool's paradise in which her father's bringing up had placed her, and rendering her more unfit than ever for the occupation that was about to be so mercifully put in her way by Providence and Mrs. Armytage.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DECLINED WITH THANKS.

I SUPPOSE it is by providential arrangement, in order to prevent our being got rid of by unfair means, that there is so great a difficulty in disposing of the remains of our poor humanity after death, but it is certainly a most prolonged and distressing affair. Day after day, so long as the tenantless clay is above ground, the house is plunged in gloom, and made to assimilate itself by its blinded windows to the thing it holds. An abject terror, begotten by the object that, when in life, was dearest to them, takes possession of the more youthful or imaginative members of the household, and becomes for them the last and most abiding memento of him. Surely it would be better, when all has fled

that made him dear to us, that he should be removed at once to some edifice designed for that purpose, there to await the day of interment. And what a day of vain barbaric display and of cruel wasteful cost that too often is! It seems so hard to the survivors, however it may impoverish them, to grudge their lost one aught that may seem to show respect and reverence; and hence there are nodding plumes and prancing steeds, more befitting the advertisement of a travelling circus than to be the accompaniment of Christian burial. Mr. Scarf was not a bad specimen of his kind, and with sensible Dr. Cooper to insist on moderation in his professional display of grief, there was less to find fault with than usual; but it was not to be expected—'it would not be barely decent,' said the undertaker, 'to perform the matter otherwise'—that the brother of an earl should be taken to his last home without mutes and feathers; so that poor Ella, in addition to the natural horrors of the scene, had to face that paraphernalia by which those who have been

'rich in this world's goods' are wont (as if in symbol of the terrors awaiting them) to have their death made hideous.

She left the hotel, leaning on good Mrs. Wallace's arm, and stepped with her into the single mourning coach; her presence, though it was only indicated by an occasional pressure of the hand, was an inexpressible comfort to her, and, without it, it seemed to the poor, orphaned, lonely girl that she could never have survived the ordeal. No words of the awful service for the dead escaped her, yet somehow, greatly to her distress, it seemed to lack appropriateness. There had been little—to speak plainly, there had been nothing—in all the dead man's life to associate it with that which was to come; no word had been dropped from his lips concerning it; his thoughts had been of the world, and of no future, save her own, to the very last. What comfort she experienced arose from the beauty and solitude of the churchyard itself, which impressed themselves upon her, notwithstanding that her eyes were riveted throughout upon that which she

was to behold no more. She was conscious, however, of a large concourse of spectators, who kept reverent silence, and of a bird that held its song throughout the closing scene and mingled its last notes with the falling mould. She noticed, too, that the coffin was covered with fresh flowers, and on the journey home inquired of her companion who had sent them. 'Not that I need ask,' she said, with trembling gratitude.

'Nay, darling, it was not I,' answered Mrs. Wallace; 'they were sent from Clover Cottage.'

Mr. Felspar and Mr. Vernon had been present, as were all the guests of the hotel, Mrs. Wallace informed her.

'That was kind indeed,' said Ella.

As such matters seemed to interest her, and in order to divert her thoughts, her companion went on to say, 'And I think you must have at least one friend more than you wot of, my dear; or if not, she must have been a most tender-hearted woman, for I never saw one more moved with pity for another. It was

some lady from the Castle; a Miss Burt, they tell me.'

'I never heard of her,' said Ella, not indifferently, but in that mechanical tone in which we speak when our thoughts are far from our words.

'I am sure she must have heard of *you*,' persisted Mrs. Wallace. 'It was not, I noticed, upon your poor father's grave, but upon yourself, as you stood beside it, that her eyes were fixed. She had a thick veil on, yet I saw enough of her face to note it was a kind one, independently of the sympathy it showed for you.'

Ella answered nothing; she had sunk back in her seat, and, with closed eyes, was recalling the beautiful spot in which her father had been laid. It was a very home of rest and peace, carpeted with grass and flowers, and canopied by 'immemorial elms.' Save when the voice of prayer arose from it, the silence was unbroken, except for the dreamy caw of the rooks, or (when the wind was from the south) for the far-off murmur of the sea. It seemed to her that if she had

still a wish in life, it was to dwell there. But save for the vicarage, which, half hidden in a network of greenery, nestled beside the church, there was no other dwelling-place near it, with one exception. The most unambitious cottage would have been out of proportion to her humble fortunes, and that exception was comparatively a palace. The churchyard was shut in on every side save one, where a vista had been cut through the trees, disclosing Barton Castle.

'I noticed,' continued Mrs. Wallace, pursuing her well-meant efforts to rouse Ella's attention—and, as it happened, chiming in with her present thought—'that the flag on the Castle was half-mast high.'

'Indeed,' sighed Ella; 'then I fear I have some fellow-sufferer.'

'Not so; it was lowered, I am assured, in respect for the occasion. Mr. Edwards may be a recluse, but such an act shows at least he has some reverent feelings.'

Ella nodded in wearisome assent. If the incident had happened in the case of another, it would undoubtedly have interested her; but

the sense of loss was too new and keen to admit of other topics of thought.

'It seems so cruel, dear Mrs. Wallace,' she whispered, 'to leave him.'

'Yes; that is what one always feels. For all that, my darling, you will be better for getting away.'

Poor Ella was not thinking of herself at all. All her ideas—as happens to many of us under the same sad circumstances—were in a state of inversion. She was thinking of doing living service to him who had passed out of all such possibilities, and forgetting the personal needs that were about to be so urgent. When they reached the hotel and were in their own room, or rather in that of Mrs. Wallace, Ella suddenly inquired of her, 'When are you thinking of going to Devonshire?'

As a matter of fact, though Ella had forgotten it, the day for their departure had been fixed, and at the time she had offered no objection.

'Well, my dear, we did say to-morrow, you know,' hesitated her kind companion; 'but I

am sure if you wish to stop on longer, William will make other arrangements.'

Ella shook her head. If she was to go—and it was clear it was to be—to leave him lying alone there to-morrow was no worse than to do so a week hence.

'I am very weak and foolish, dear Mrs. Wallace,' she said, after a little pause; but you must forgive me, for it is your great kindness that gives me the opportunity of weakness. But for you I should be making my bread by this time, or rather attempting to do so. There are things too that ought to be looked to at once. Your good husband has taken them in charge, I know, but——'

'Hush, hush dear, we will talk of that another time.'

Ella was referring, as the other knew, to the expenses of the funeral.

'But if you really wish,' continued the kind old lady, 'to give your mind to business, something has occurred here. I hardly know how to speak of it, but I am sure you will not be offended with me.'

'Offended with you! I should as soon think of being angry with Providence.'

'That's just what I said to William!' exclaimed Mrs. Wallace, with precipitate adhesion. '"I am sure the dear girl has confidence in me, therefore let *me* speak to her about the matter, and nobody else; she will know that I mean no harm."'

'I know you mean nothing but good,' said Ella gently; 'my good and every one else's.'

'Well, let us suppose what I have got to tell you about, my dear, was undertaken only for your good: some think it was from mere vanity and ostentation; and certainly the fact of Mrs. Armytage being the prime mover in it is not an assuring circumstance.'

'Mrs. Armytage! What can Mrs. Armytage have to do with me?'

'Well, it was this way. When you told Mrs. Trant the other day that you were not well off, she did not keep the matter to herself, as she should have done, and of course people were very sorry; and there was a meeting in

the ladies' drawing-room, by Mrs. Armytage, and everybody was there except me, my dear. And here's the subscription list,' added Mrs. Wallace, with nervous abruptness, producing a roll of paper.

For the moment Ella's pale cheeks became rosy red, as though some hand had smitten them. The thought that her father's daughter should so soon have become an object of public charity was indeed a bitter one. Though she held the paper opened before her, she could not read it, because of the tears of mortification that sprang to her eyes. If absolute strangers had done this, it would have seemed less degrading; but that acquaintances—mere acquaintances, who could never have been her friends, but who, up to within the last few days, were her equals—should have taken it in hand to give her pecuniary assistance was a humiliation indeed. With an effort, however, she recovered herself; after all, she reflected, the offer, as Mrs. Wallace had endeavoured to convince her, was doubtless a well-intentioned one; and she was no beggar, for she had asked

nothing of them, nor had she the least intention of accepting their bounty.

'I was afraid you would not like it, my dear child, but there was no choice but to let you know of it. And it was better that the thing should come through me than through any one else. My husband, acting under my advice, did not put down his name for anything; indeed, nobody put down their names, and—as it seems to me—for a very good reason; of course you will not accept it.'

'I shall certainly not accept it, my dear Mrs. Wallace,' said Ella, with cheerful distinctness; 'but, at the same time, I am astounded as well as deeply touched at the very great kindness and generosity that has been displayed to me.'

'Well, that is what I call being thankful for small mercies, my dear. Why, the whole thing comes to what?—a matter of twenty-five pounds, is it not?

'Twenty-five pounds! My dear Mrs. Wallace, it is a thousand and twenty-five pounds. Listen:'

'"*At a meeting of some friends of Miss Ella Josceline, held in the ladies' drawing-room at the 'Ultramarine,' the sum of* 1,025*l.* 10*s. was collected on her behalf, and will be paid over to her in any manner she may please to direct.*"'

'Lor, my dear, let me look at it. William said it was a beggarly subscription to which he should be ashamed to put his name.'

'But there are no names at all,' observed Ella.

'No, that was settled. You were not to know, William said, who gave you twopence and who gave you threepence. Let me look at the handwriting: it's Dr. Cooper's, I'll take my affidavit, because it's so like his prescriptions. And here *is* Dr. Cooper coming up the road.'

The Doctor, who had visited Ella semi-professionally every day since her father's death, had in fact called to see how she found herself after the ordeal of the morning.

After a few words of sympathetic greeting to his young friend and patient, he began at once

upon the subject which had just been occupying the attention of the two ladies.

'I conclude, Mrs. Wallace, that you have made that little communication known to Miss Ella with which I entrusted you?'

'Yes, I have, Doctor.'

'Very good. And she accepts her friends' gift, no doubt, in the same kindly spirit in which it is offered her—one from which I do assure her all sense of obligation is absent, and —now don't cry, Miss Ella—it was particularly hoped by the donors that you should not be distressed—the word used was "upset," I remember; but the terms are synonymous—by this expression of their goodwill.'

'I can't help crying, Doctor, and it does me good,' said Ella. 'Such tears give me no pain, I assure you; it makes me almost happy to think that there is such generosity in the world, even towards such an unworthy object as myself. I cannot accept this munificent gift, but from the bottom of my heart I appreciate it.'

'Cannot accept it! Why not? I say again you are putting yourself under no obligation.

The whole affair has been explained to me in detail; and the great point is, that I am not to tell you one bit of it. You are never to know who gives the money, and therefore you can never be made uncomfortable by receiving it; you are to take it as though it dropped from the clouds.'

'Just so,' assented Mrs. Wallace. 'A thousand and twenty-five pounds ten shillings have dropped from heaven, and it would be a most wicked thing if you didn't pick it up.'

Ella shook her head; her face had suddenly become very grave. 'I could in no case accept it, Dr. Cooper,' she said stedfastly; 'but, in replying to that effect, I should like to know the names of those to whom I am, all the same, so greatly indebted. An acknowledgment of their proposed kindness is the least they can expect. It is dreadful to speak of such matters in a calculating and comparative manner; but from what Mrs. Wallace has said to me, I cannot but think that the great bulk of this munificence proceeds from one individual.'

'That is quite true; and why not? It

comes from an anonymous donor—one who especially laid it upon me that he, or she (for I am not going to tell you even the sex), should remain anonymous. What is your objection to that? No one but myself knows who he, or she, is, or ever will know. The whole of the money is in my hands, awaiting your directions.'

'Then it must be given back again,' said Ella firmly.

She felt as certain as though she had seen his cheque that Mr. Aird had added a thousand pounds to the contributions of the other subscribers; and from his hand, least of all, she was resolved never to accept a shilling. It was quite probable that nothing but his own generosity and pity for her sad condition had suggested such a princely gift; but her father's dying words, 'I wish you to marry Mr. Aird,' still rang in her ears, and made another construction of that gentleman's conduct possible.

'Am I really to understand, my dear young lady,' inquired the Doctor with grim concern, 'that you positively refuse what is, in fact, a maintenance, though not a competence, for

life? Are you aware how hard it is for all of us, worst of all for one of your sex, and especially one brought up as you have been, to gain a livelihood? And, above all, have I made it quite plain to you that the money is offered in all delicacy and consideration, without proviso or drawback of any kind, such as the most sensitive mind need shrink from?'

'Indeed, dear Dr. Cooper, I understand all that,' said Ella earnestly. 'It is impossible for any one to have behaved more generously—more graciously—than the person of whom I speak. But when you tell him that my rejection of his munificence proceeds from a sense of right and duty—not of pride—I am sure, if I know his character, he will feel neither hurt nor offended.'

'He will not feel that, Miss Ella,' replied the Doctor gently; 'but he will certainly deeply regret (as I do) the course you have thought proper to take. Mr. Aird, for since his attempt at remaining anonymous has failed (through no fault of mine, as you will bear me witness), further concealment of his identity is absurd—

Mr. Aird, I say, feels a very deep and genuine interest in you, while your behaviour to his child has laid him under a deep sense of obligation. It was little Davey's hand (as if to excuse his father's offer of pecuniary assistance to you) which brought me the cheque, which the donor hoped would pass unrecognised in the grand total of the general benevolence.

'Tell him—tell Mr. Aird from me,' said Ella, deeply moved, 'that I estimate the consideration with which this noble offer has been made as highly as the offer itself.'

'But, my dear young lady, will you not tell him so yourself? You will surely wish him and little Davey good-bye. When Mr. Aird learnt that Mrs. Wallace had offered you a home, his gratification at the fact was heightened, as he himself told me, by the thought that you would be with common friends, so that he should not —as he expressed it—lose sight of you. Indeed, I think,' added the Doctor, turning to Mrs. Wallace, 'he promised to pay you a visit in Devonshire.'

'Certainly he did,' responded the lady ad-

dressed; 'and I am looking forward to us four all being together there, just as we were in the Prior's Hostel, only, please God, in good health.'

This news sent a thrill of something like horror through Ella. The idea of Mr. Aird's wanting to marry her was one that, but for her father's words, would never have entered into her dreams. If it had been suggested to her by any other human being save him alone, it would only have evoked her laughter; nor did she even now believe in the probability of it. But somehow it had since become in her eyes a possible contingency; and at all events, which was almost as distressing to her, there was the consciousness of what her father had intended, always associated with Mr. Aird, and this made his presence intolerable to her. His present munificence—though she acquitted him of any other motive for it save a generous impulse—increased this feeling of repugnance; she almost felt (like one who has entered into a plot against his benefactor) remorseful and ashamed at every token of his goodwill.

'I cannot see Mr. Aird,' said she, sadly but firmly. 'I am not equal to it, Doctor; I am not, indeed. I will see little Davey, of course, before I go; but as to his father, pray spare me. I have had of late too much of farewells.'

The Doctor looked at her with a puzzled air, which seemed to say, 'Now this surprises me in so sensible a young woman.' He replied, however, 'Just as you please, Miss Ella. You shall see nobody you don't like: my medical veto will protect you from all intrusion. Your resolve, however, will disappoint some kind friends. I must say for those two young gentlemen at Clover Cottage, since they will have no opportunity of saying it for themselves, that their sorrow for your sad case is sincere indeed. If their going barefoot to Barton and back to-day would have given you the least comfort, they would, I am sure they would, have done it cheerfully.'

'I believe it—I—oh, thank them for me, Dr. Cooper,' cried Ella, breaking down for the first time, and sobbing as though her heart

would break. 'I was wicked and ungrateful indeed when I called myself friendless, since you and they, not to mention my best of friends here,' and she laid her hand caressingly on Mrs. Wallace's shoulder, 'have treated me with a kindness far beyond my deserts.'

'There we all differ from you,' said the Doctor, confidently. 'The general impression, and at Clover Cottage particularly, is that Fate has treated you very hardly. However, there are brighter days in store for you, and I trust I shall live to see them before I sing my *Nunc Dimittis*. You entrust me, then, as I understand, with all your "good-byes?"'

'If you will be so very good, Doctor, as to undertake them, yes; but I must, of course, acknowledge in writing the kind intentions of these good people,' here she pointed to the subscription list, 'independently, that is, of Mr. Aird.'

'Not a bit of it,' exclaimed the Doctor, sharply. 'I'll just tell them that you "decline with thanks." It is not true kindness that dictates their sort of benevolence. We were in two

minds, Mr. Aird and I, that is, whether we should ever let you hear of it; only he thought it might be the means of affording you material assistance without laying you under what you might mistake for a personal obligation. No, no; you shall not write a line. They would frame and glaze your acknowledgment of their trumpery offer, and boast of the favour they had done the grand-daughter of the Earl of Boroughby as long as they lived. It's like publishing a book by subscription; by which, for every *bonâ fide* purchaser, you are saddled with fifty patrons at five shillings a head.'

'But they must not think me ungracious, Doctor,' pleaded Ella, smiling at the other's vehemence.

'If they do, it will be their own fault, my dear Miss Ella. I'll be as polite'—he was about to say 'as your dear father,' but stopped himself just in time, and added 'as a Frenchman,' instead.

Here there was a knock at the door. 'Now, if that's Mrs. Armytage,' muttered the Doctor, 'sooner than let her come in and patronise this

unhappy girl I'll throw the woman down-stairs.'

It was not, however, Mrs. Armytage, but Mrs. Trant, with a visiting card in her hand.

'If you please, Miss Josceline, this lady has called and wishes to see you on very particular business.'

'A lady?' exclaimed Ella; 'there must be some mistake. What lady?'

'Miss Burt of Barton Castle.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

MISS BURT.

It might well be supposed that after refusing, on the score of physical disability, to see her friends, Ella might have excused herself from receiving a visit from a stranger. Something, however—she scarcely knew what—impelled her to make an exception in favour of Miss Burt, whose name she at once recognised as having been so sympathising a spectator at her father's funeral; she owed her something, at all events, for that mark of respect and anything that had just now connection with the dead man had force with her. The message Mrs. Trant had brought, that the lady had very particular business with her, no doubt also aroused her interest. In such a case as hers, to find anyone associated with

her lonely lot in any way was a matter of grave importance.

Since the interview seemed to promise to be of a private character, the Doctor and Mrs. Wallace had withdrawn, leaving Ella alone, pale and fragile-looking, but by no means embarrassed (for sorrow conquers shyness), to await her visitor. Of the lady whom Mrs. Trant presently ushered into her presence she could at first only remark that she was tall and slight, and dressed in almost as deep mourning as herself. It was not until the landlady had withdrawn that she raised her veil and disclosed a face of singular beauty. She was not, however, a young woman, nor were her good looks of the kind we are wont to associate with youth; her delicate features bore the traces of sorrow of a far earlier date than that which now possessed them. For the moment, indeed, though her blue eyes were full of tears, one would have said that pity rather than sorrow held the chief place with her, to judge from the tenderness with which she addressed her young companion.

'I am come to you, my dear girl,' she said, 'unsought and unsummoned, in this your hour of trial, to offer you my loving help. My real name, as you doubtless know, is not what is written on that card, but Vallance.'

Ella stared at her visitor in unfeigned astonishment. But for the earnestness of her tone and manner, she would certainly have had doubts of her sanity.

'Vallance!' repeated Ella thoughtfully, 'Vallance! Now you mention the name, madam, it does seem to arouse some sense of association, but so vaguely that it takes no shape.'

The visitor regarded her with a surprise as great as that which her own face had just expressed.

'Do you really mean to tell me, Miss Josceline, that the name of Vallance—Vallance—is unfamiliar to you?'

'Yes, madam; it is utterly unfamiliar. If it is the name, as I conclude, of some friend of my dear father's, I don't remember his ever speaking of it to me.'

At these words Miss Burt sank back in her chair like one less astounded than shocked by some unlooked-for communication of woe; but after a moment or two she seemed to collect her energies, and, uttering a sigh of relief, observed, 'Then at least he never spoke to you in disparagement of any person who bore that name?'

'Most certainly not.'

'Did he never speak of—his—his connections or relations?'

'Very rarely. My father, unhappily, was not on good terms with them. They have always behaved towards him with neglect and coldness and disrespect.'

'Indeed!'

The word was uttered so drily that it was impossible to mistake its significance.

'You would seem to say, madam,' said Ella, with heightened colour, 'that there were faults on both sides. I do not believe it; and in any case this is not the time to discuss the matter.'

'Quite true, dear girl,' answered the other

gravely; 'it is not the time for anything but gentleness and forgiveness and submission to God's will. As regards your father's relatives, the Joscelines, be assured that I am not come here as their advocate against him. I know little of them, and I care less. I only care for you.'

'For me?' answered Ella wonderingly. 'You are very kind to say so, but——'

'But why, you would ask,' interrupted the other perceiving her embarrassment, 'are you thus addressed by one who is a stranger to you, and of whom, as it seems, you have never so much as heard? I hope I have some pity for those who are bereaved, since I have suffered the like sorrow. I hope I have some sympathy with those who are friendless, since I am friendless too; but it is no feeling of common humanity that brings me here. There is a tie between us, my dear girl, far closer than that. Is it possible that you can make no guess at what it is?'

Ella shook her head, but not in negation. Her limbs shook under her, her breath came

thick and fast with the presentiment that she was on the brink of that revelation which all her life she had been yearning for, but had not dared to precipitate.

'Think, think again,' said her companion gently; 'there must be a problem in your mind that has often presented itself for explanation. Does the name of Vallance suggest nothing to you *now*?'

'Was it—was it—' faltered Ella, 'my mother's name?'

'It was.'

An ineffable tenderness and pity possessed the visitor's face as she said those words.

'And you?' inquired Ella, trembling in every limb. For the moment she thought it possible—just possible—that her mother herself (though Miss Steele had assured her that she was dead) might be standing before her. Upon reflection, however, she felt convinced that the schoolmistress would never have consented to assist in so cruel a deception.

'I am your mother's sister,' said Miss Burt softly; 'Hester Vallance. Kiss me, darling.'

Her arms had opened wide, and Ella had thrown herself into them as she spoke, in a torrent of tears. The tidings she had just heard, coming so close upon the trying events of the morning, had been too much for her.

'Don't speak; don't try to speak,' murmured the visitor tenderly; 'sob out your sorrow on my bosom, darling, for it is loyal to you, and it is your natural home.'

'But why, oh why?' murmured the girl, presently, as she lay like a tired child in the other's arms, 'did papa never mention you to me?'

'We will not talk about that now, my dear,' answered the other in an altered tone; her voice had suddenly become frigid. 'It is a long story; let it suffice for the present that we have found one another. Now tell me what are your plans?'

In as few words as possible Ella explained the circumstances of her position, and the generous and hospitable offer that had been made to her by Mrs. Wallace.

'You will, of course, do as you please, my dear,' said her new-found relative; 'but it is plain that I am your natural guardian, and, as it happens, I am able to offer you a home. My position, it is true, is but a humble one. I am housekeeper to Mr. Charles Edward, of Barton Castle, but the situation is a very exceptional one. He lives a very secluded life, and leaves all domestic arrangements entirely in my hands. My visit to you is known to him, and the purpose of it. He knows who you are and who I am, and approves of the reasons which have caused me to pass under a feigned name. If you like to come and live with me—nominally as my assistant, and with a small but sufficient salary—I think I can make you happy. Of the happiness you will confer upon myself by such an arrangement I will not speak, because I wish you to make your choice without pressure. I will now leave you, that you may do so at your leisure and free from all embarrassment. Let me know your decision this evening, and to-morrow I shall return either

to bid you good-bye, or to bring you back to what I hope will be your future home.'

Under other circumstances it would naturally have occurred to Ella that so precipitate a leave-taking on the part of her visitor, after a revelation so important and astounding, was somewhat strange. Taking it in connection with the mystery so long surrounding her mother's identity, she might however have ascribed it to its true cause—a desire to avoid for the present all opportunity for asking questions; but as it was, the girl's relief at the prospect of being left alone with the thoughts and considerations that crowded in upon her overpowered all other considerations. She felt her aunt's proposal to be only of a piece with the delicacy and kindness that had distinguished her throughout the interview, and far from endeavouring to prolong it, she only sought to express her happiness and gratitude.

'I shall not be vexed, remember,' were her visitor's last words, 'if you should eventually decline my offer, and prefer that of older

friends. On the other hand you must understand (though I am not just now at liberty to explain how this is) that I am offering you no menial position. You will be your own mistress—strange as it may appear to you—or nearly so, as much as you are at this moment. And I will only add that you will receive from me the welcome of a mother.'

With one more affectionate, nay, passionate embrace, she was gone, leaving Ella in a tumult of expectations and apprehensions, such as might have resulted from the visit of a denizen of the other world. That some painful secret was connected with her dead mother she felt certain, or surely her new-found relative would have been less reticent concerning her; nor did it fail to strike her that her aunt had omitted to speak one word of condolence respecting her recent bereavement. This latter fact, however, she put down to a disinclination to open anew the floodgates of her grief. Her aunt had come to make a definite offer, to which it was necessary for her to say yea, or nay, within a few hours;

and her object had naturally been to keep her niece's mind free to deal with it, and as undisturbed by sentimental emotions as possible.

To Ella it was an inexpressible joy to find herself no longer the waif and stray on the ocean of life that she had pictured herself; to know that she had not lost, as she had imagined, the only tie that connected her with the human family. And had not Mrs. Wallace herself acknowledged, though so earnestly desirous that she should make her home with her, that the bond of kindred had a prior claim to that of friendship? At Barton Castle she would be quite close to where they had laid him who had been, and still was, the dearest to her on earth, and living there she could pay him daily reverence. This perhaps just now was the reflection that weighed most with her. But she also remembered that Mr. Aird had announced his intention of visiting Foracre Farm, whereas at Barton Castle she would be free from the embarrassment of his presence. Moreover Mr. Edward, as it seemed, lived the life of a recluse, and the members

of his household would necessarily pass their days in quiet and solitude, which for the present were of all things what she most desired. As for the duties in store for her, they would be welcome to her whatever they might be; and in performing them to her uttermost she should give pleasure to her aunt, which would be reward enough. It had been one of her misgivings that at Foracre Farm she would be a useless appendage to the establishment, and perforce unable to repay in any way the hospitality that had been offered to her. Upon the whole she made up her mind to accept her aunt's proposal.

With any one but Mrs. Wallace she would have feared to appear ungracious in thus declining at the last moment her offer of a home, and even as it was the task was an embarrassing one. More than all she feared her friend would express a natural curiosity concerning Miss Burt—the reason of her change of name, &c.—and especially would seek to know on what account that lady had imitated Mr. Jos-

celine's reticence with respect to his late wife. To Ella all reference to her mother was at once both hallowed and tender ground, and she shrank, though she scarce knew why, from treading on it. As it happened, however, Mrs. Armytage's vehement onslaught against the late Mr. Josceline in the ladies' drawing-room had put Mrs. Wallace on her guard. She was slow to believe in scandal at any time, and least of all when it was directed against her friends. But she felt it was possible there had been something wrong in the relations between Mr. Josceline and his wife, and her lips were therefore sealed as regarded any mention of her to Ella. As to the arrangement proposed by Miss Burt for Ella's future, Mrs. Wallace only regretted it on her own account, which in her case was always a subsidiary matter; so far as her young friend was concerned, she rejoiced that she had found a relative and a home.

'And if upon acquaintance with them, my dear, you do not like them,' she said tenderly, 'remember that a loving welcome always awaits

you at Foracre Farm. Of course it is a great disappointment to us; I am afraid to say how great, because that might make you conceited,' she added, smiling (the tears had risen to her eyes, and she wished to do away with their effect); 'but it would be very selfish in John and myself to wish matters otherwise, since you have now, you see, what it is always well to have, two strings to your bow.'

What alone, therefore, now weighed upon Ella's mind with respect to her departure, was the saying 'good-bye' to those who would fain have been her host and hostess, and the apparent ingratitude she was about to exhibit in leaving it unsaid to others. Her disinclination for any meeting with Mr. Aird was, however, so excessive, and the impossibility of omitting him, if she made an exception in favour of any one, so obvious, that to this latter resolve she adhered. Dr. Cooper had promised that he would make her excuses for her—not only with the authority and decision that his profession enabled him to do, but with every expression of kindness and gratitude; and with that

assurance she would have had to be content, but for a happy thought suggested by little Davey. When the child came to take leave of her on the morning of her departure—an interview which affected her exceedingly, and would have done so still more could she have foreseen the future—she made him also a medium of acknowledgment to his father of the generosity he would have shown her, and of her thanks to his friends Felspar and Vernon for the many evidences of their goodwill.

At noon came her aunt with a closed carriage for her, in which she left for Barton; her life at the *Ultramarine*, until those last sad days, had been a very happy one, and to leave it and the friends she had made there cost her no small pain; yet if she had been going to Devon she felt that her grief would have been still more keen, for she would have been in that case leaving the dead as well as the living.

'Mrs. Trant tells me that you leave behind you many a well-wisher at Wallington, my

dear,' said her aunt, softly, as they wound down the hill to the village.

'Yes, yes,' sobbed Ella, 'every one at the hotel has been so kind.' But she was not thinking only of those at the hotel.

Presently they passed Clover Cottage, at the door of which stood both its tenants, with bared heads, and every appearance of sympathy and respect.

'Mr. Felspar I know by sight,' said Miss Burt, as they passed by; 'but who was that other young man, who showed such great feeling?'

'It was a Mr.—Mr. Vernon,' stammered Ella.

Miss Burt regarded her young companion thoughtfully for a few minutes, and then said, 'I fear you will find the Castle very dull, my dear, after the life you have been accustomed to lead. His Highness sees absolutely no company.'

'His Highness?'

'Yes; by-the-by, that is what he prefers to be called. Perhaps—though it is not abso-

lutely necessary—you would not mind making use of the term just once—when you first see him; afterwards you can always call him "Sir."'

'But is he not Mr. Edwards?'

'Hush! not Edwards at all, the name is Edward; but that is only an incognito. I will tell you all about him presently; but if you don't mind very much, at your introduction to him, it would be a great point—a very great point indeed—if you would kiss his hand.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BARTON CASTLE.

'If I don't mind it very much I am to kiss his hand,' was the thought that monopolised Ella's mind as the carriage passed through the lodge gates—unlocked to receive them, and closed and fastened directly they had entered—and drove through the broad avenue of oaks that led to Barton Castle. Who on earth, then, was this Mr. Edward to whose household she was about to belong, and what was the mystery in connection with him? From the gossip at Wallington she had only learnt that he was a recluse, kind and charitable to the poor, but always employing others to be his almoners; and that he lived in a sort of semi-state, though without seeing company of any kind. Her impression had been that he was an eccentric personage,

who, having taken some unreasonable disgust to society, made use of his great wealth to render him entirely independent of it. She remembered the information which the postillion had given about him on their arrival, and it now recurred to her mind that her father had on that occasion shown a considerable interest in the man's relation of the matter, as though it had in some way concerned himself. Was it possible that he was aware that her mother's sister was living in the service of Mr. Edward? In that case she did not wonder at his reticence, for she well knew, notwithstanding his openly expressed contempt for the Joscelines, he had a great deal of family pride. And again, who was this Mr. Edward to whom a woman of culture and refinement, as her aunt evidently was, could play the housekeeper without, as it seemed, any sense of humiliation?

As she came in sight of the Castle, she saw the red flag flying on its midmost tower, which, as she now remembered, betokened (as though he were a royal personage) the presence of its tenant. For the moment, her recent loss, and

the novel circumstances in which she had so suddenly and unexpectedly found herself, were lost sight of in an overmastering curiosity.

As the carriage drew up at the foot of the broad stone steps that led to the entrance of the Castle, two footmen in scarlet liveries appeared, as if jerked out by a spring, on either side of it, while a personage in sober black, but with knee-breeches, silk stockings, and shoes fastened by a silver buckle, came down to meet them.

'The groom of the chambers,' whispered Miss Burt, in answer to Ella's questioning glance, who, in her simplicity and amazement, was by no means certain that it was not His Highness himself.

This official conducted them into a noble hall, the walls of which were hung with ancestral pictures, alternating with armour and ancient weapons of all sorts. In the centre of it, as if to welcome them, stood a short thickset man in ordinary costume, except that his fingers were laden with more rings than is usual with the masculine sex. His brown hair, which was

thin and lank, stuck closely to his blonde and pudgy face, like reeds about a cream cheese, and his whole appearance would have been vulgar, as it was certainly uncomely, but for a pair of brilliant brown eyes, which by their vivacity and intelligence went far to redeem it. For all that Ella knew, this again might have been the lord of the Castle himself—it was like opening a present packed with layer after layer of paper, each of which to the curious recipient appears to be the final one—but her doubts on this point were once more dispelled by her companion, who introduced the personage in question as 'Mr. Heyton, His Highness's secretary.'

It did not escape Ella's natural quickness, stimulated as it was by curiosity, that her aunt's tone was stiff and frigid; moreover, she noticed that her introducer made no mention of her being her niece. As Miss Burt's manner in other respects conveyed no sense of disparity of rank on either side, Ella justly concluded that Mr. Edward's housekeeper (if such indeed was her aunt's position at the Castle) was not on friendly terms with Mr. Edward's secretary.

Mr. Heyton's manner, on the other hand, was studiously polite and even effusive. His voice was soft and low, and he had a way of placing his white plump glistening hand on the region of his heart as he spoke, that gave a sort of dramatic earnestness to what would have been otherwise small talk.

'You have brought the sunshine with you, Miss Josceline, as indeed,' he added, with a parenthetic bow, 'might only be expected. You could scarcely have seen the Castle for the first time under more favourable circumstances.'

'The park looked very beautiful as we came along,' replied Ella, scarce knowing what she said; for Mr. Heyton's keen and penetrating eyes gave her at least as much discomfort and embarrassment as did his compliment.

'It is fortunate that Barton possesses some natural beauties,' continued the secretary, 'since it has little else to interest the visitor. I am afraid after the changeful society at the *Ultramarine* that you will find our life here very insipid. We must, however, do our best to afford you some amusement.'

'Miss Josceline is not just now in a mood for amusement, nor even to make new acquaintances,' observed Miss Burt with severity. 'You do not appear to comprehend that she is suffering from a recent bereavement.'

'Pardon me,' returned Mr. Heyton, in a tone at once unabashed and cheerful; 'there is no one,' and here he touched his heart, 'who deplores it more than myself. But, in my poor judgment, it is better under such sad circumstances to endeavour to distract the mind by innocent and wholesome enjoyments.'

'Has His Highness expressed a wish to see Miss Josceline?' inquired Miss Burt, without taking any notice of this recipe for depressed spirits, and speaking even more scornfully than before.

'If it is quite convenient to her, I have his orders to introduce her at once,' and he turned to Ella as if to consult her wishes.

'Nay,' said Miss Burt firmly, 'I must claim for once to usurp your office, Mr. Heyton, and to conduct Miss Josceline to his presence myself.'

With a significant pressure on Ella's arm, she led her to a door at the extremity of the hall. It stood in shadow, but Ella noticed it was surmounted by a small gilt coronet. Miss Burt knocked sharply on one of its carved panels, and a voice within bade them enter.

The room to which they had thus gained admittance was somewhat remarkable. Its one window, which would otherwise have commanded the park, was entirely composed of painted glass, diffusing a sort of gaudy gloom; the walls were lined with ancient tapestry, which still further subdued the light; so that had it not been for some assistance from a skylight, itself concealed by a horizontal curtain of white silk, the objects in the apartment would hardly have been discernible. As it was, the rays from above were concentrated in a peculiar manner at the far end of the room, so as to bring out in strong relief the figure of its solitary tenant. This was a man of about five-and-forty years of age, of swarthy complexion, and with grave and glittering eyes. He had been seated at a desk covered with

ancient parchments, from which he rose with dignity as the ladies entered, and came forward a few steps to meet them.

'Your Highness, this is my niece, Miss Josceline, of whom I have had the honour to speak to you.'

Mr. Edward (to use the only name by which the tenant of Barton Castle was known to his neighbours) turned on the young girl a compassionate look, which would have been almost parental save for a certain touch of condescension, and held out a large white hand.

Perhaps, in her confusion, Ella forgot the injunction that had been laid on her, or it might be that her pride revolted against obeying it; but, instead of kissing the proffered hand, she held out her own to meet it.

Mr. Edward smiled good-naturedly, as a grown person might do at a child's mistake, and pressed her fingers warmly.

'I am acquainted,' he said, in tender, though somewhat sonorous tones, 'with your recent loss, Miss Josceline, and beg of you to be assured of my most sincere sympathy. In

the quiet of Barton, and in the loving custody of your aunt, I trust you will recover in time your health and spirits. For the present, as you have doubtless been informed, we are living in great retirement, such as is hardly suitable, I fear, to youth and beauty.'

'It is most suitable, sir, to me,' said Ella quietly, 'and will be very welcome.'

The compliment he had paid her, though similar to that of his secretary, did not give her the same offence. The air and manner of the speaker was stately and measured, while his words seemed to partake of the nature of a general sentiment rather than to have any personal application.

'I am deeply grateful,' she added, 'that through my aunt's good offices you have been so good as to offer me——' She hesitated; for, in fact, she did not know what had been offered her, and she could not bring herself to say 'a situation,' as though she were the new housemaid.

'Let us say a home,' put in Mr. Edward kindly, 'if, as we hope, we shall be able to

make it appear such. Miss Burt has, I hope, made it plain to you that you will be our guest so long as it suits you to remain at Barton Castle.'

'You are most kind—most generous, sir,' said Ella, deeply touched by the other's delicacy and consideration; 'but I trust——' she was about to add some equivalent, which in her confusion she could not find, for the expression of a hope that she might be of some assistance to her aunt, when that lady pulled her by the sleeve. She then perceived that her host was once more holding out his hand to her, no doubt to indicate that the interview was over. With a sudden impulse, born less of gratitude than the desire to please, she took his extended fingers and raised them to her lips.

Mr. Edward smiled at her more benignly than ever. 'The members of my household,' he said (in a tone that might have implied there were two hundred instead of two of them) 'generally associate together; but you will keep to your own apartments or not, as you please, Miss Josceline.'

Ella felt herself gently pulled from behind, and, yielding to the pressure, she mechanically did what her relative did by design—namely, backed, as from a presentation at Court, out of their host's presence.

Overcome by contending emotions, some of them serious enough, but the very seriousness of which by the strong sense of contrast heightened the absurdity of her position, no sooner had the door closed behind her than Ella broke into a little laugh, which had at least as much of hysterics as of mirth in it.

'Hush! hush!' cried Miss Burt earnestly.

'But, my dear aunt, it was so very funny, that giving me his hand to kiss, and our going out of the room backwards.'

'Still, my dear, when you are as old as I am,' replied her companion gravely, 'you will have learnt that kindness and delicacy are much too rare in this world—no matter by what weaknesses they may be accompanied—to afford a subject of ridicule. The man you have just seen is one of the noblest and most generous of created beings. It does seem

strange, nó doubt,' she added, very gently. 'I do not blame you for thinking him a little mad; but, oh! my dear, if all the sane people had but half his virtues, this earth would be far more like heaven. But walls have ears in this house. Come in here, my darling, where we shall be always quite private, and I'll tell you all about him.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A REVELATION.

'WHAT a lovely little room!' was Ella's first exclamation on being introduced to an apartment the beauty of which compelled her admiration, consumed though she was with curiosity to learn the history of her mysterious host; 'you don't mean to say that I may always sit with you alone.'

'You may when you wish me to come and see you,' returned Miss Burt, all sign of distress swept from her pleasant face, and replaced by that best of expressions, the sense of having given pleasure to another; 'it is your own private snuggery, my dear, and no one else's.'

'Mine! what, this lovely sitting room!' She looked round with delight upon the well-filled bookcases that lined the walls, the fresh

flowers upon the table, and the piano with its layers of music books. 'Oh, how can I thank you enough, Aunt Hester?'

'You can thank me best,' answered the other, with glistening eyes, 'by being happy here; only remember it is not I to whom you are indebted. I have only had the arrangement of matters.'

'Yes, but with what forethought and kindness you have arranged them! This is the outlook'—she pointed to the window, which, though it had the park for a foreground, commanded a side view of the village churchyard —'which of all others in this world I should have preferred. While sitting here, I can still fancy myself near my dear father.'

'That, however, was not the reason why I placed you here,' observed the other. Her tone was so peculiar that Ella looked at her in some amazement. 'That is, my dear,' continued her aunt, very gently, 'it was no portion of my plan for your happiness to keep alive in your mind any sad memories. I chose the room because it has a north aspect, which is most

suitable for painting, and a little bird has told me that you are an artist.'

'The little bird must have had a very flattering note,' replied Ella, smiling: 'but if locality and surroundings make the artist, I ought to be a credit to the profession. It is a bower for a princess. What lovely flowers, and what beautiful books! Why have they all a coronet upon them?'

'It is not a coronet, my dear, it is a crown,' returned Miss Burt, with a gravity that seemed quite out of proportion with the rectification of so slight an error; 'and that forms a portion of what I have now to tell you. Did you ever hear the story of the infant Stuart of St. Rosalie?'

'Never.'

'Well, briefly, there are some who maintain that the Young Pretender as he was called, Charles Edward'—she hung for a moment on these two words—'left behind him a legal heir, by his wife, the Princess Louisa Maximiliana de Stolberg. This child is said to have been brought to England, where he grew up and

married. It was a *mésalliance* in one sense, of course, supposing him to have been the man he was affirmed to be, but the union was a legal one, and had issue in one son. The family, the heads of which are known as the Comtes d'Albanie, is not the only one which assumes to be descended from him. Mr. Charles Edward—for so he chooses to be called by the outside world, instead of by his patronymic of Stuart—claims to be no other than the great-grandson of the Young Pretender, and heir to the English throne.'

'Gracious goodness!' ejaculated poor Ella. The exclamation fell very short of her amazement, and was, she felt, sadly commonplace, and altogether inadequate to the occasion. 'Does he think he is the King of England?'

'*De jure*, yes; he is as certain of it as that he has breath in his body.'

'And do you believe it, Aunt Hester?'

'Don't ask me, darling. I can only say that I try not to disbelieve it. Of one thing I am sure, that no more noble and princely heart ever beat in human breast than that of the man

I speak of; he is generosity itself, and possesses every other attribute that may become a king.'

'Then that's why you call him His Highness, and wanted me to kiss his hand?' observed the wondering girl; her astonishment at her host's pretensions preventing her for the moment from paying attention to the other's eulogium on his virtues.

'Yes, I thought it was better for you to do it, if possible, before you knew the reason, for fear—well, I am sure you would not have laughed about it if I had told you how deeply —and being so good a man—he takes the thing to heart; but now for my sake, darling, for my sake——'

'I am not going to laugh, Aunt Hester, I am not indeed,' said Ella assuringly, though only too conscious that she was on the confines of laughter.

'I was afraid you were, my dear; you looked like it; and of course people do laugh, who don't know His Highness, when they hear him spoken of by that name for the first time. Up to this point I am sure you have behaved

admirably. I never knew him so taken with anybody as he seemed to be with you, and it's only the first time that he insists—not, however, that he is at all exacting—on having what he considers the proper marks of respect paid to him. And you did pay them, most gracefully and most naturally I am sure.'

'But I am not sure that it was right,' said Ella doubtfully; 'it is surely very hypocritical——'

'That is just why I didn't tell you,' interrupted her companion naïvely. 'She has such an independent spirit,' I said to myself, 'that if she knows, and doubts (and I don't mean to say doubting is not natural, at all events till you come to know him), she will never stoop to flatter him. But if she doesn't know, and only wishes to please him, and since to kiss his hand is so very simple—don't you see?'

'I am afraid, Aunt Hester, you are not very simple,' said Ella, smiling, 'but, on the contrary, very artful and diplomatic. I don't believe I could ever have brought myself to do

it—I think not, I hope not—if I had thought I was flattering his credulity.'

'Nay, dear child, it is not that,' returned the other earnestly. 'Nothing that you could say or do, or that anybody else could say or do, or omit saying or doing, would make the slightest difference to his own convictions on the matter. He may be wrong, but in the faith that he is the last of the Stuarts, and their only lineal descendant, he is fixed, and will die in it.'

'But, my dear aunt, he must know at least that other people are not of that opinion?'

'He knows that the outside world are not, and has therefore cut himself off from them.'

'But the inside world?' persisted Ella; 'does he suppose that the members of his household, as he calls them, believe him to be Charles Edward Stuart?'

'Most certainly he does.'

'And *do* they believe him to be so? I do not speak of yourself, of course,' put in Ella quickly, perceiving a look of distress and pain flit over her companion's face; 'you have already explained to me your own position.

But do those who are not so easily moved to admiration by his good qualities, who are not so susceptible of gratitude, and not so anxious to confer happiness on others, as you are—let us take Mr. Heyton for example——'

'How do you know that Mr. Heyton is not susceptible of gratitude?' put in her companion keenly.

'I did not say that, my dear aunt; I was only speaking comparatively, though I should certainly think he was not given to enthusiasm; he seemed to me, I must confess, somewhat affected and finical.'

'He did, did he?' replied Miss Burt with a quiet smile. 'You come to your conclusions—though, mind you, I don't say you are wrong in this particular case—very rapidly, my dear.'

'Nay, it is only an impression, not a conclusion. But you have not answered my question yet. Does Mr. Heyton—His Highness's own secretary—believe in these pretensions?'

'You had better ask him yourself,' answered Miss Burt evasively. 'I will say, however, if His Highness's claims were acknowledged—

his rank a matter of public notoriety—Mr. Heyton could not treat him with more outward reverence. It is he who helps to make things stiffer and more formal here than they otherwise would be. If his master were a mere dreamer, in fact, which is not the case, you would say that he encouraged him in his hallucinations.'

'I see; he humours him like the prince in the play, to the top of his bent.'

'I would not say that, my dear,' answered Miss Burt reproachfully. 'His Highness, unlike Hamlet, is neither mad nor does he pretend to be so; and as for Mr. Heyton, it is not for me to look into his heart.'

'And the servants?'

'They know nothing. They are highly paid for an exceptional service, and they perform it. Perhaps the mystery that surrounds their master invests him with as much respect as though they were convinced of his claims. You are quite right to endeavour to ascertain how matters stand here, my dear,' she continued kindly; 'it is necessary to your own position that you should do so. If anything is still on

your mind, as I think it is, pray give expression to it; it will not offend me.'

'Indeed, Aunt Hester, I have asked questions enough, when it was rather my place to have been silent, and to have taken with thankfulness what your kindness has provided me with; but everything is so new, and strange, and unexpected, and—and—I am not quite sure that—that——'

'You mean you are not quite sure, my dear,' interrupted her companion quietly, 'that in remaining here and accepting His Highness's hospitality, you are not doing wrong?'

'That is just what I wanted to say,' said Ella, 'though it seems so ungracious, and—and——'

'Such a reflection on myself, you mean, my dear,' observed her companion, again coming to the rescue. 'What you feel, but do not like to express, for fear of wounding my feelings, is that you are accepting His Highness's hospitality under false pretences. Now let me put you right on that point. You are doing nothing of the kind. His Highness knows, as well as I

do, that you do not as yet believe in him. He may be a fanatic or a visionary (though, as I have said, in my opinion he is neither), but no one who knows him can think him to be a fool. What he hopes is that in time you may become a convert to his views.'

'That he ought to be the King of England?' ejaculated Ella. 'Oh dear me! I could never think that.'

'Nor need you, my dear,' continued the other earnestly. 'It is even doubtful whether he goes so far as that himself. It is a mere question of evidence in connection with the St. Rosalie story. Even if that is true, he is at most the last of the Stuarts, just as Cardinal York was thought to be before him. Do not suppose, my dear child, that the scruples you entertain did not at one time occur to me also; but I am thankful to say they exist no longer, and I do my duty without a prick of conscience. It is true, however, that I am under the greatest obligations to His Highness. The opportunity of entering his service was offered me at a most opportune time, and in the

most gracious manner; and his kindness to me then and since has been excessive.'

'That, of course, makes a difference,' said Ella thoughtfully. She could well imagine that a sensitive and affectionate person like her companion, naturally free from scepticism, could easily bring herself to believe in those she loved. 'Would it be an impertinence to ask, Aunt Hester, how it was that you first became acquainted with—with His Highness?'

'It is certainly no impertinence, my dear,' answered the other gravely. 'Indeed, sooner or later I felt that you must needs put that question; but, for the present, let it suffice to say that the circumstances under which I was first introduced to him were painful and peculiar. I came to him—not, indeed, under a false pretence, for I told him all—but under a false name, in consequence of a domestic calamity, and in seeking for a livelihood and seclusion I found a competence and a home.'

'Had the domestic calamity, Aunt Hester,' inquired Ella, in hesitating tones, 'anything to do with my mother?'

'Yes.'

Only that one word, but freighted with enough tenderness and sorrow to have sufficed for a new *In Memoriam*.

'May I not ask about her?' inquired Ella pitifully, her face as white as the dawn, and with a shiver as though 'the breeze from out the distant gloom' were stealing over her. 'May I not ask about my own mother?'

'It is better not, my darling; only pain can come of it.'

Ella bowed her head, and was silent for many minutes. The secret of her father's silence concerning her mother had at last, then, been revealed to her. Oh, fatal curiosity! how far better it would have been for her to have died and never known it! How many tender fancies, how many self-imagined memories, had once filled her heart! She only knew now that they had been rudely shattered. 'Let me know the worst,' she presently said, in a low and husky voice.

'The worst?' answered her companion, with a look of distress and horror. 'The worst of whom?'

'Of my—my mother.'

'The *worst* of her?' exclaimed Aunt Hester, with passionate vehemence; 'you must be mad, child. There is no worst. There was no bad connected with her from first to last; she was the best, and purest, and most long-suffering of women; and she is now an angel in heaven.'

Ella threw herself on her knees, and, with a sharp cry of pain, laid her face in Aunt Hester's lap.

'Oh, how wicked I have been!' she sobbed, 'How wicked, and how vile, to have entertained a thought of ill of her who bore me!'

Aunt Hester looked down on her with an indescribable gentleness, and softly smoothed the wandering tresses that hung about her knees.

'It is a sad and shameful story, darling; but the sadness was your mother's, and the shame—another's. She suffered from the slander of evil tongues; but she was sinned against, not sinning. Let us not think of it—let us not speak of it.'

Alas! it is easy to say 'let us not think' of this or that; but there are thoughts which have

more force than deeds with us, and are far more importunate. Ella's mind had indeed been relieved of one burthen—the terrible suspicion of the wrong-doing of the mother she had never known; but it had been replaced by one of almost equal weight, the conviction of the wrong-doing of the father whom she had known.

'Were papa—and mamma—separated?' she presently whispered; 'actually separated?'

'She obtained a divorce from him,' was the reply, in a tone which implied compassion indeed, but also the desire of the speaker to be quite distinct upon that matter. 'It was then that she came to live with me. Our love had passed the love of sisters, but in an evil hour she had exchanged it for——. No matter; it was always hers, and waited for her. I changed the name which had once been hers (because she wished it), to avoid recognition and to efface the past. She died when you were an unconscious infant, in these loving arms; but her heart was with you to the last. "My poor child!" were her last words.'

'God help me! What am I to think—what am I to do?' cried Ella despairingly.

'Imitate her goodness, my darling; revere her memory,' returned Aunt Hester. 'You can do nothing more, and she needs nothing, being in heaven, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are rest.' She stooped down and kissed her niece's cheek. 'I will leave you for a little to yourself,' she said. 'This is the last time I shall speak about the past, my child. If I could have spared you, I would have done so; but the truth had to be told.'

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE CHURCHYARD.

Is there anything worse than loss?

> To say he has departed,
> His voice, his face is gone—
> To feel impatient-hearted,
> Yet know we must bear on.

Is not that the very climax of human woe? To most of us, thank heaven, it is so; but to some few exceptional sufferers there is a still more bitter drop to be drained from the cup of life. It is the conviction forced upon us, after the loved one's death, that he was not so worthy as we had thought him to be. Ella Josceline was by nature too sensible, by habit too truthful, by disposition too genuine, to have made for herself a picture of her father's character, even though he was lost to her, of

the saintly or even the sentimental sort. She was aware that he had been a man of the world, and though she did not know all that is signified by that term (nor the tenth of it), she knew enough to dispel the mere conventional filial illusions. On the other hand, she had not only admired him and felt a pride in him, but had loved him for his own sake, quite independently of the love he had borne to her, and which had been naturally reciprocated. Whatever might have been his faults—and she had admitted to herself the probability of their existence—she had always believed him kind; and now that he was in his grave, and all his acts and words of love for her were fresh in her memory (which, indeed, as respected herself, retained nothing to his disadvantage), she had been suddenly given to understand that it was not so—that, in a word, he had been cruel, faithless, and, where it behoved him to have sought forgiveness, implacable and vindictive. For that he had maintained so ominous a reticence concerning his married life from shame or self-reproach, she knew him better than to

believe; and if she did not give credit to the charge brought against him, she must needs believe that in some measure, if it were but as regarded 'incompatibility of temper'—vague term, but significant of so much—her own mother was to blame. At the moment, she was unaware that her father had once been a clergyman, who had been disgraced; but it is doubtful whether that revelation could have increased the sum of her present sorrow. To her thought, the desecration of the office would have sunk into insignificance beside the disgrace of the man. If he had disregarded the most sacred of human feelings—made his own wife miserable, his own home desolate—that his ministrations at the altar should have been a profanation and ineffectual would have followed as a matter of course.

For a time, the charge against her father, doubling as it did her sense of recent bereavement (for it seemed to her that she was losing him, or, rather, what she had thought to be him, a second time), overwhelmed the girl almost utterly; but by degrees the 'low be-

ginnings,' not indeed 'of content,' but of comfort, began to stir within her. She reflected that her aunt was the kin of the one party in this sad dispute, and the antagonist, in all probability from the very first, of the other; and, without disloyalty to her mother, she was able to convince herself that if the conduct of her father had not been represented to her in a partisan light, it had at all events been exaggerated and made the worst of. And yet, so strong was her sense of justice, that she felt no indignation against Aunt Hester for the colouring which this suggestion presupposed her to have put upon the unhappy history of her parents. It was only natural that she should have seen all the virtues of the one and all the shortcomings of the other. As for herself, the best, and indeed the only course that was left to her, was to dismiss from her mind as far as possible this evil record of the past, to cling to the good of which she had been told, and to the good of which she had had experience, and to forget the sorrow of the one parent and the shame of the other. Were they not both in

heaven, as she hoped and believed, reunited and reconciled? Why, then, should she think of them as separated and antagonistic?

To this resolve—difficult and austere, it may here be said—she in the main adhered, and it had this immediate advantage, that it withdrew her mind from the morbid contemplation of death and loss, and forced it into other channels. To her aunt it seemed that the girl had wonderfully soon 'got over' her trouble, which that lady ascribed to the conviction produced by her own arguments that the late Mr. Josceline was not a person whose society was, on the whole, to be grudged to the angels—in which matter she much misjudged her niece.

On this very occasion, indeed, when the tumult of her emotions had subsided, Ella's first act on leaving her room was to let herself out by a postern door, which her aunt had indicated to her, and which opened into the park, and take her way to the churchyard. Under the shadow of God's house, and beneath the tender sky, it would be hard indeed if any disparaging thoughts should intrude upon her

concerning the dead who lay there; nor did they do so. On the other hand, her reflections did not wholly confine themselves to the channel that she had in a manner marked out for them. There is no doubt that conventional persons have the advantage over others in keeping their spiritual thoughts under control; the people whom the apostle rather brusquely expresses himself as being 'ashamed of,' because of their respect for times and for seasons—saints' days and Sundays—and who form, after all, the bulk of our respectable church and chapel goers. As soon as they find themselves in the 'sacred edifice,' as they term it, their thoughts mechanically detach themselves from worldly matters, and shoot heavenwards, though not perhaps to any great altitude, as though from a spring-board. Such a disposition of mind seems to me as enviable as it is commendable; but it is certain that others, who are occasionally at least capable of much higher flights of devotion, do not share this gift. They find a difficulty in being religious of malice aforethought, as the law terms it. The presence

of a bird in the church, or even of a butterfly, is fatal to them; at the sight of the many-hued intruder their mind flies to the scheme of creation, with its wonders and its beauties; with its mysteries and its contradictions; they cannot for their lives follow, as they would fain do, the Rev. Mr. Poundtext in his exposition (not altogether novel, perhaps) of 'Fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute.' On an Ash Wednesday they are unable to feel any wickeder than they did before Lent began; while on the other hand, on the most cheerful of the Church's festivals they may be bowed down with remorse and penitence. In this respect the character of Ella Josceline was sadly wanting. She had an 'undisciplined mind,' otherwise it would surely not have happened that, standing by her father's grave, with her heart, as it were, swept and garnished and prepared for the reception of heavenly thoughts, it should suddenly have received worldly tenants. Yet the first thing that struck her as she gazed upon the fresh-turned turf was that it was strewn with flowers, and the first

question that she put to herself, so far from being a soul-searching one of the proper kind, was 'Whose hand could have placed them there?' She had herself, on her way through the park, gathered a few wild flowers with that pious purpose; not that the Hon. George Emilius Josceline had greatly cared for wild flowers during his lifetime, or had presumably changed his taste in the interim, but simply that they were all that she had to give, and that they seemed in some vague and gracious way to express her filial love. But the tribute which had been already paid was of another and far more costly kind—the rarest and purest treasures of the conservatory—camellias, azaleas, and lilies of virgin whiteness, but with the very name of which she was unacquainted. What pious hand could have done her father such rich reverence? That it was not Aunt Hester she felt certain; at the best, her relative had only displayed towards him a cold indifference—at the worst, an ill-concealed antagonism. Was it, could it be the same hand which yesterday had done the like—that of Mr. Vernon? The colour

rushed into her pale face as this suggestion occurred to her, and her heart beat with quicker throbs. It was curious that she never thought of Mr. Felspar, though she had been informed that the earlier gift had come from Clover Cottage, and had therefore in all probability been a joint contribution from the two young men. The next moment, however, it struck her that not only in the former case had the flowers been of the common garden kind, but that at Wallington camellias and azaleas were unattainable. In the Castle alone, where there was doubtless a conservatory, could they be procured, and therefore from the Castle they must have come. They were doubtless, then, a gift from His Highness.

To some minds this would have seemed a delicate attention; but to Ella, although she acknowledged the kindness of the act, it was on the whole displeasing. From Mr. Vernon, who had known her father, such a tribute was touching and grateful; but from a stranger's hand it was far otherwise. There was something, too—though it only vaguely presented itself to her mind—of unhappy appropriateness in these

costly blossoms; unlike the simple wild flowers she had gathered, and which they seemed to flaunt as a high-born beauty despises the daughter of the fields, they were of artificial growth, as the character—and especially the faults—of her father had been. Fashion and splendour had never been welcome to her, but they had now become hateful. She felt doubtful whether, no matter under what easy conditions, she could live long in yonder Castle, surrounded with pomp and stateliness, although the glitter was of tinsel. The thought of homely Mrs. Wallace and of that farmhouse in Devonshire came over her like a breath of fresh air. But upon that home she had no claim; whereas upon this one she had a sort of right by proxy, so far as her aunt's services to its lord entitled her to it. What she yearned for was independence, and this could be only gained by her own exertions. 'Work! work!' was now the one cry of her bruised heart. In work she might forget her sorrows, and begin life anew; and she felt that she ought to be grateful for the asylum that had been offered to her, and

where the leisure and opportunity for study would at least be hers. In the rapid glance she had cast at the bookcase in her sitting-room, she had noticed that it had included some works on perspective and figure drawing, and to these she resolved to apply herself. She felt a hunger in her heart to be up and doing, such as rarely comes to a young girl; and yet she had been orphaned but one short week. The luxury of grief was denied to her, as it is always denied to those who are poor. Henceforward, not death, but life, and how to make her way in it, was to be the matter for her thoughts. Such was the frame of mind in which Ella Josceline turned away from her father's grave. If Mrs. Armytage had been aware of it, she would have sarcastically termed it a 'very pretty' one; but it was not poor Ella's fault, but the force of circumstances, that restrained her emotions within such very moderate limits. Her ears and eyes, and her powers of mental observation, were as alive to all that passed about her as though they had never known the torpor of bereavement.

Her way back to the postern was a foot-path, which, after it left the churchyard, was intersected by another that led to the front of the Castle; along this second path there was coming some person whom, as they approached one another, she made out to be Mr. Heyton. She had no wish to meet him, and therefore moved more slowly that he might pass by, on his way up the park, before she reached the intersection; but, to her annoyance, he decreased his own speed so as exactly to meet her. This was bad taste in him, she thought, considering that, seeing her come from the churchyard, he might so easily have guessed her late errand. But Mr. Heyton's expression did not wear by any means the expression of one who had, or could have had, bad taste imputed to him; it was one of serene but affable self-complacence. He raised his hat a few inches, with gradual grace, and murmured a hope that the beauty of Barton Park came up to Miss Josceline's expectation.

'It is a lovely spot,' she said.

'Hitherto,' he continued, 'our home land-

scape has lacked a fitting figure in the foreground to set off its beauties. It now possesses one.'

For the moment Ella felt inclined to be indignant, but the air of the man was so exaggerated, and the manner in which his right hand sought his heart so dramatically droll, that it was almost impossible to be seriously offended with him. Her view of the case was that His Highness's secretary, having no belief in the genuineness of his master's pretensions, found it necessary to 'make believe very much,' and to practise courtly airs and graces on every opportunity, in order to keep up his *rôle*.

'I should have thought,' said Ella gravely, 'that the best figures in the foreground of a park were herds of deer, such as the pretty creatures I see yonder.'

'You may call them pretty creatures,' said Mr. Heyton, with irritation, 'but handsome is as handsome does, and some of them are not nearly so nice as they look. There are half a dozen as savage beasts among them as you may find in the Zoological Gardens, and more

than once, but for my personal agility, my life would have been sacrificed to their fury.'

'Indeed!' said Ella. The word was not a very sympathetic one, but the fact was, the idea of Mr. Heyton—a gentleman certainly stout and pudgy, and presumably short-winded—pursued by stags, and escaping from them by reason of his superior speed, was so exceedingly striking and incongruous, that she could hardly keep her countenance.

'Yes,' he resumed; 'most persons would have had enough of it, and not ventured in the park again; and indeed it would be no great punishment if at Barton one's home walks were restricted to the private gardens. By-the-by, you have not seen the gardens? It is His Highness's wish that you should make use of them. Permit me to be your cicerone. It won't take you ten minutes,' he added, as Ella hesitated.

The offer was by no means attractive to her, and she would have much preferred that her aunt should have introduced her to the beauties of her new home rather than Mr.

Heyton; but his intention was evidently to be civil to her, and it was just as well not to behave in any way that could be construed as churlish by her new acquaintance. She therefore expressed her thanks and agreed to his proposition.

'The gardens are in this direction,' he said, pursuing the path by which he had already come; 'they were placed at some little distance from the Castle for the accommodation of its previous tenant, who' (here a cynical smile came over his face) 'was afflicted with hallucinations.'

'But I thought I saw the gardens on the right as we drove up this morning,' remarked Ella, not a little surprised

'The public gardens, yes; they of course can be seen by anybody. It is only, however, His Highness and the members of his suite who have access to these I shall have the honour to show you. They are unique in their way. There is the wall that surrounds them; pretty tallish, you will observe, so that De Lunatico, as I will call him——'

'Call who?' inquired Ella, surprised out of her grammar, for the secretary's tone had been so significantly sly that she could hardly resist the conviction that he was referring to his employer.

'Well, let us say, the last tenant of the Castle,' was the cool reply; 'he was put in an asylum at last, you know, but in the meanwhile they tried rest and seclusion, which only made him worse; it does in some cases.'

And Mr. Heyton turned his twinkling eyes as though they had flashed from a dark lantern, full upon Ella's face. She had no doubt in her own mind that he was experimentalising upon her; trying to see how far her faith extended with regard to the pretensions of her host, or perhaps seeking to entrap her into an expression of incredulity.

'I never heard that they had that effect,' she answered with an indifferent air.

Mr. Heyton gave a short little laugh, which said as plainly as laugh could speak, 'Dear me, how cautious we are!' and opened the garden door.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THRUST AND PARRY.

THE High Garden (as it was called) at Barton, though on an elevated spot as its name implied, was considerably lower than the ground about it; it was like a large circular pond, which, instead of water, contained beds of beautiful flowers. These were arranged in the modern style, in masses of red, white, and blue, and had a charming effect. A terrace ran round the whole, from which walks descended at right angles, and crossed the garden in prim and formal fashion, so that it almost resembled a figure in Euclid. The air, shut in and warmed by the high walls, was heavy with scent, and very still; except for the murmurous hum of bees there was not a sound to be heard; and the flag on the Castle tower was the only object from the outside world that

intruded itself. On one of the terraces were two gardeners at work, whom Ella was more pleased to see than she would have liked to have owned to herself; if she had known the place had been so retired, she would certainly not have accepted Mr. Heyton's invitation to explore it; there was something of familiarity in his manner, which she had not at first observed, which annoyed her. 'This is our little Paradise,' he said, 'wherein, not choosing to take our walks abroad, like other people, we take our pleasure, and fancy ourselves monarchs of all we survey.'

The reference to His Highness was manifest, but Ella was resolved to ignore all such allusions.

'I don't wonder at such a spot being a favourite with you, or indeed with anybody,' was her guarded reply. 'I suppose,' she added, pointing to the southern corner, where a number of glass-roofed buildings twinkled in the sun, 'those are the greenhouses.'

'What made you think that,' he inquired quickly.

'What else can they be?' she answered with surprise.

'True, it was a very natural supposition. No; they are orchard-houses. I will take you through them.'

'Thank you, I had rather not,' said Ella, quietly; 'I dislike the heat of such places.'

She began to entertain a vague apprehension of her companion; his tone was not actually rude, but it fell little short of it. It was the manner of a superior to an inferior; very different, however, from that which His Highness exhibited. If he had been presuming upon their disparity of years, treating her as if she had been a mere child, she could easily have borne it; but the feeling of resentment she experienced was too strong to have arisen from such a cause; she felt a dread she had never felt before, that this man might say something impertinent to her, and she was more than ever thankful for the presence of the gardeners.

'You dislike heat, do you?' he answered; 'so do I. The worst of this place is, that it

has no shade. That door on the north terrace opens into the pine-wood; on the hottest day it is always cool there.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes; and what is very curious, if but a very little wind is blowing—as to-day, for instance—the fir-trees make just the same music as the distant murmur of the sea. Should you like to hear it?'

'No; at least not now. I must be going indoors, as my aunt will wonder what has become of me.'

'Oh! Miss Burt is your aunt, is she?'

The colour rushed into Ella's face; she felt the blood coursing through all her veins, and also a pang of shame.

This man then had—or would, at all events, imagine he had—caught her out in an act of duplicity. It had not struck her at the moment that the fact of her relationship to Miss Burt had not been disclosed to Mr. Heyton.

'Yes; Miss Burt is my aunt, sir.'

'Then your grandmother must have mar-

ried twice,' remarked her companion coolly; 'since your mother's name was Vallance.'

'You seem to have possessed yourself of a great deal of information about my family,' said Ella with a faint smile. She did not know what harm she might have done by the admission she had just been led into; but as a punishment for her own want of caution, as much as to avoid further mischief, she resolved, if possible, that she would have no quarrel with this man.

'Anything that concerns you, Miss Josceline, must naturally be of interest to other people,' he said with his outspread hand upon his breast, as though it had been an order. 'But in this instance I can hardly claim for myself the knowledge of your ancestry. His Highness himself was my informant. It is the one business of his life to keep himself informed concerning the birth and parentage of every member of the British aristocracy, to which, you know, you belong.' And again he chuckled to himself even more significantly than before. Again Ella felt her face flush,

and this time with indignation. What, to her sensitive ears, the chuckle seemed to imply, was the incongruity between her station as regarded birth, and her present condition—which was certainly humble enough. And yet something told her that it was no part of her companion's intention to insult her, but rather to remind her (perhaps for her own good, since it could hardly be for his) of her position in their common patron's establishment.

'I sometimes wonder,' he went on, with that old touch of cynical humour in his tone, 'whether His Highness's solicitude about such matters is merely an abnormal development of a natural devotion to the peerage, or whether it has a more personal origin.'

'What do you mean?' inquired Ella; not that she cared what he meant, but because she was anxious to turn the conversation from the discussion of her own affairs.

'Well, you see, His Highness has great hopes; and just as the Pope is said to file a list of all our Church endowments against the

day we all become Catholics again, so he keeps account of all the nobility that will one day—perhaps—acknowledge their allegiance to him.'

He uttered the word 'perhaps' in such a tone of contempt (the garden walls fairly echoed to it) that Ella could not forbear saying, 'You do not seem to think very highly of His Highness's claims, Mr. Heyton?'

'His claims? Miss Josceline, you astonish me!' exclaimed the other, with well affected indignation; 'when have I said one word that could authorise—I mean, encourage you—to make such an observation. I was alluding—solely—to the unlikelihood of their receiving any public acknowledgment. At present, no one save you and me, who are in his confidence, and about his person, and perhaps half-a-dozen others, are so much as aware of their existence. It is necessary in these days for one who would attain any kind of eminence to be extensively advertised. If the distinguished personage whom we have in our minds would go about in a coach-and-six, with

a French horn (to give the affair a Court-of-Versailles flavour), he would invite perhaps enough of believers to form a party. The other Claimant—I mean the Tichborne—has done it even with a van and drums; but here we live, not indeed "a violet by the mossy stone half-hidden from the eye," but in solitary state, without so much as a weekly organ to advocate our rights. I wish we had one. By Jingo, I should like to edit it,' grinned the little man. 'And I tell] you where we have made another omission,' he continued, obviously with great enjoyment of his own humorous conceit: 'we ought to belong to the old religion. That is the only genuine article for the last of the Stuarts. Without a father confessor the whole affair is incomplete. We ought to have masses twice a day or so, for the repose of our great-great-grandfather's soul.'

Under other circumstances Ella might have been unable to restrain a smile at these suggestions; but when she called to mind the relation of the man who made them to the

object of his satire, and how the very claims he scoffed at procured his daily bread, she blushed for shame. 'Is it possible, Mr. Heyton, that you can thus turn into ridicule pretensions from which you yourself'—she hesitated, then added—'and indeed all of us, derive advantage.'

'Oh, then, you believe in them, do you?' returned he, sharply; 'now, that is very satisfactory. I was afraid—that is I thought it possible—not, of course, that I took you for a sceptic, but that just at first the notion of a new claimant to the throne of England—the last of all the Stuarts—might have been—dear me—a little——'

It is impossible to reproduce the provoking way in which Mr. Heyton hung and hesitated upon every word, waiting, as it seemed, for her to interpose with some expression of incredulity or doubt.

'I did not say, Mr. Heyton, that I believed in the claims at which you have hinted; I have never said so.'

'Not in words,' he put in quickly; 'but

surely, at least on one occasion, you have admitted them by tacit consent.'

She knew, of course, that he was referring to her late interview with their common patron, and for the third time the telltale colour came into her cheeks. The taunt, if not wholly undeserved, was most disingenuous, and, in the mouth of him who spoke it, in the worst taste.

'You are mistaken, sir,' she said. 'His Highness will tell you, if you choose to ask him, that I came here absolutely ignorant of his position, almost of his existence.'

'Just so,' replied the secretary with a sly smile, that contrasted provokingly with the seriousness of his tone. 'It is the suddenness of your conversion that makes it, as I have said, so eminently satisfactory. Now your aunt—for she *is* your aunt, it seems —was very incredulous; it took her, I believe, several days to be convinced that her principle could be reconciled with her interest.'

'At all events,' said Ella coldly, 'neither

my aunt nor I could turn into ridicule, as you have done, our common benefactor.'

'As *I* have done!' echoed Mr. Heyton, in a tone of amazement. 'Did anyone (he looked appealingly towards the two gardeners who were, however, well out of earshot) ever hear the like? *I* ridicule our common benefactor? Heaven forbid! Welcome death rather than such dishonour. I may have seemed to make an innocent jest of His Highness's pretensions; but, my dear young lady, has not Coleridge himself (a philosopher one immensely admires) asserted that a man cannot be said to believe in a religion unless he can afford to laugh at it—that is, to see its weak points. Now, in His Highness's claims there are —it must be confessed, in the St. Rosalie part of it, for example—just one or two weak points; though the whole chain of evidence, taken as a whole, is most conclusive and irrefragable.'

'Of course, if His Highness is aware not only of the stability of your convictions, Mr. Heyton, but of the means you adopt, after Coleridge, to prove it, that is another matter.'

The secretary's beady eyes flashed out a quick, suspicious glance, as though he would have said, 'I wonder, now, whether she is in jest or earnest?' Then he answered very slowly and distinctly, 'His Highness knows me so well, Miss Josceline, that I am quite sure, if a slanderous tongue should hint anything to the discredit of my fealty, he would treat the accusation with contempt, and also'—here his tone grew even more deliberate—'I, on my part, have some little knowledge of His Highness. If I thought his ear was in danger of being abused by anybody, I should take such steps as would at once and for ever remove that individual from about his person. He, or she—for I should do my duty, even if it were one of the gentler sex—would no longer have to complain of imprisonment in Barton Castle.'

'Imprisonment! why imprisonment?' inquired Ella; she felt a certain mischievous pleasure in the alarm she had evidently excited, which caused her to assume an air of indifference. Her companion, on the other

hand, as if he had read her thoughts, and regretted the hint of menace with which he had been betrayed, at once adopted the same tone.

'Is it possible you did not know the conditions on which we live here?' he answered lightly. 'That the members of His Highness's household are all prisoners on parole? Now, dear me, that is very curious.'

'I know nothing about it, Mr. Heyton.'

'But surely you must have guessed. How was it, for instance, that ever since you were at Wallington Bay, you never saw your aunt, think you?'

'To be sure, that ought to have struck me,' said Ella, looking down, and stirring the gravel with her foot, but conscious that the secretary's eyes were looking her through and through.

'It is true, there may have been some reason,' he continued, 'best known to yourself, for that; but in the case of the other tenants of the Castle—of myself, for example —I should have thought it would have oc-

curred to you as curious that we remained invisible.'

'True; if I had known of your existence it might have done so no doubt,' admitted Ella.

The secretary bit his lip. He felt that this young woman was at least as impervious to coercion as to patronage. 'Well, well, at all events, such is the fact,' he said, with a touch of peevishness; 'it is understood that we do not leave the Castle without leave. At the same time, my dear young lady,' he added earnestly, 'if you should ever wish to exercise that privilege, a word from me to His Highness—— Talk of the devil—I mean an angel, and you hear the rustle of his wings. Here he comes, and with those infernal dogs. They always fly at me, and nobody else, as if I were a wild beast.'

The remark was evoked by the appearance of His Highness at the garden door, through which, at the same moment, rushed a couple of gigantic deerhounds, who came racing down the gravel walk towards the secretary as

though he had been a stag of ten which they had just started. There, however, the parallel ended: the secretary, in the absence of antlers, or even an umbrella, had no intention of showing fight, but was manifestly in a state of extreme perturbation. Ella would, perhaps, have shared his apprehensions on her own account had not Mr. Heyton already complained to her that he alone was the object of the dogs' animosity. As matters were, she was getting seriously alarmed for his personal safety, when suddenly a shrill call was blown from a silver whistle, and 'Turk' and 'Jasper,' without checking for an instant their headlong career, swirled round like greyhounds who have turned a hare, and flew back to meet their master, who with slow and stately steps was coming down the walk.

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